

The Commander

by Selphie Leonhart

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Summary: Six months after the defeat of Ultimecia, a new evil threatens the SeeD's, this time as one of their own.

## 1. Default Chapter Title

The Commander Part One ~ Birth Of A Sorceress

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By Selphie Leonhart

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Rating: 15 for bad language, violence and \*adult\* situations. This is kinda slow moving, but stick with it! Please!

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This is a sequel to FF8.

About six months after the defeat of Ultimecia, Squall has taken over as the Commander of Garden at Cid's request, Rinoa is boarding there and studying, and Quistis has regained her teachers license. Seifer is one of her pupils. Their lives are all disrupted once more, as a new evil appears, this time as one of their own...can Squall discover what is the right thing to do in time to save the world again? Or will his love for one of his friends blind him to the correct course of action?

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Rinoa sighed and crossed her arms in annoyance. "I don't get it." she said wearily, throwing her remaining cards down on the table. Standing behind her, Selphie grinned and put her hand on Rinoa's shoulder.

"He's taking advantage of you. Get him to explain again." she said. Zell laughed.

"It's not my fault! The rule is simple..." he said, gathering up the cards, including the GF card he had just won from Rinoa. She watched as he gloated over Siren, narrowing her onyx eyes.

"I'm sure you're cheating. The Plus rule is stupid anyway." she said sulkily, then turned and grinned at Selphie.

"Hey, shall we go to the Quad? I said I'd meet Squall there after he's finished studying." she said. Selphie nodded.

"Yeah, but we'll have a long wait." she replied, smiling at Rinoa's quizzical look.

"He's introducing the new cadets today. And he has to finish looking over the finance for the new training center. And he has a major test tomorrow. Your boyfriend has a lot on his plate." she said, collecting her card case from the table. Rinoa sighed.

"I know. He's always so busy." she said, looking downcast. Selphie slipped her arm through hers.

"Gives us more time to gossip. Come on, lets go." she said. Zell hurried after them, and then paused, remembering something.

"Whoa...Squall has a test tomorrow?" he said, a confused look on his face. Selphie rolled her eyes.

"Yeah....you forgot, didn't you?" she said, amused. Zell punched the air, anxiety showing clearly on his face.

"Damn! Yeah, I forgot, guess I'd better go to the library and study..." he said, a slight smile crossing his face. Selphie giggled.

"I know you wont get much studying done there." she said. Rinoa laughed.

"Of course he wont. He'll be to busy drooling over Celesa." she said, smiling at her friend. Zell shrugged and turned away, jogging towards the library. Rinoa turned back to Selphie and the two slowly walked to the Quad.

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Squall sighed as he put aside another stack of papers. He had just finished reviewing the budget for the new training center, and glancing at the clock on the wall, knew it was time for him to go and meet the new cadets. Great, a bunch of kids. He thought, looking over the files of the new 5 to 7 year olds which had applied to join Garden. Their next six months here were crucial to them, as it was during this period of time it was decided whether or not they had the dedication to become a SeeD. Squall was the one to explain this to them.

Flicking through the files absently, he ran a hand through his hair,

pushing the strands back from his face. He was exhausted, he hated paper work. Sitting at a desk for most of the day did not agree with him. Momentarily, thoughts of Rinoa flashed into his mind, but he quickly shut them out. There would only be time for that later. For now, he had duties to attend to.

Putting down the files he had already read three times, his eyes fell on the photo on his desk. It was one of the six of them, taken at the celebration party last year after their victory. Selphie had left it on his desk one day, knowing he would never put one up himself, and he had decided to leave it there. Picking up the silver frame, he looked closely at the photo. He and Rinoa were standing together, she had her arm around his waist. Irvine was standing behind Selphie, his arms around her stomach, and her hands were clasped on top of his. She was wearing his hat, Squall noticed with a smile. Quistis was standing close to Zell, and Squall was a little surprised that she wasn't smiling. Probably just caught at a bad moment, he thought. Replacing the photo, he stood up and took the lift downstairs to the main waiting room, where he knew the various SeeD hopefuls were waiting.

There were twelve of them, all under the age of ten. Most of them were male, and all looked nervous. They looked at Squall in awe as he approached them. He was wearing his SeeD uniform, and his sheathed gunblade was hanging from the belt at his side. It was mainly this which caught the children's attention. They all stood up when prompted by Xu. Squall nodded to her, and she took her place at his side.

"Welcome to Balamb Garden," he began, trying to put some spirit in his voice as he spoke to the young children. It was hard, he was so tired.

"Today is very important for you. It is your first day in a military academy. Not only that, but it is the beginning of a new lifestyle for you. You will be trained in not only combat, but magic, academic studies, culture and ways of thinking 'normal' people are not trained in. Not all of you will make it, but if you find this way of life suits you, and you are of benefit to the Garden, when you are fifteen, you may take the SeeD exam." Squall paused, looking around at the children. He knew they would not understand the significance of his words until much later, but it was his duty to deliver them. He continued.

"You will have a chance to join an elite mercenary force. SeeD are renowned worldwide for their efficiency and ability to execute the most precise instructions. Not only is exceptional fighting skill necessary, but intelligence and the ability to work as a team are equally important. I sincerely hope you all understand this. Good luck, and I hope to see you all again shortly." he finished, looking to Xu. She smiled at him, and turned to the children, giving them a meaningful look.

The children gazed at her with wide eyes, then appeared to remember. They saluted Squall, clumsily, staring at Xu for her approval. She smiled at them, and motioned for them to sit down. Squall gave the children one last evaluating look, and turned to leave. Xu, after reassuring the children that they did fine, followed him.

"Well done Squall," she said softly, following the younger man into

his office. He sighed, and sat down heavily in his chair. Xu stood in front of his desk, smiling sympathetically.

"You've got a lot of work on now Squall. Why don't you let me handle some of the paper work?" she said to him. He looked up at her, his eyes shadowed.

"Thanks but I can manage. It's my job." he said with a wry smile. Xu sighed.

"Squall, it's too much! Cid never had so much work, this isn't healthy for you. You can't run the Garden and be a Seed also. Please, Squall, let me help you." she said, concern showing in her tone. He looked down.

"You're busy too. You've got your share of the work." he said wearily.

"But I don't attend lessons anymore. You are still in training. At least let me help out until you complete your training. Then you can have all the hard work back." she said with a smile.

"You've got three years. I'm only just eighteen." he reminded her. She gave him a look which told him she knew.

"Well, we can't carry on like this. We'll have to organize you a secretary or something." she said, glancing at the photo on Squall's desk. He followed her gaze.

"I know. I haven't spent much time with them recently." he said. Xu nodded.

"Yes. You need your freedom Squall. You're still so young, you shouldn't be tied to a desk all day, and studying the rest of the time. You should be out in Balamb town, going on drinking binges, getting into trouble, having fun!" she said with a little laugh. He smiled.

"Yeah, like I used to do." he said sarcastically. She smiled.

"So, what do you think? Could you manage to work with a secretary? Or would it irritate you too much?" she asked playfully. Squall sighed.

"I guess I don't have a choice." he replied. Xu grinned.

"I've got the perfect person in mind for the job..."  
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Rinoa stretched out on the grass in the Quad, enjoying the sunshine. Beside her, Selphie lay on her stomach reading a magazine. It was quiet, as most of the Seed's and cadets were in lessons. They could hear the little streams and fountains which adorned the Quad, and the birds which resided in the trees there. The glass roof allowed the sunlight to filter through, and it was just like being outside.

Rinoa sat up as she heard someone call her name. For a moment she thought it was Quistis, then realized it was someone else. Squinting in the sunshine, she saw Xu walking towards her. Rinoa smiled at her.

"Hey. What's up?" she asked as Xu sat down beside her. Xu smiled.

"I've got a favor to ask." she said with a winning smile. Rinoa looked at her curiously.

"What?" she asked. Xu took a deep breath.

"How would you like to be Squall's secretary?" she asked. Rinoa frowned.

"I..don't know how," she said, but then smiled. "He's agreed to having a secretary?"

"Yes. You'd be perfect. Squall wouldn't be able to live with anyone else. They'd annoy him too much." she said with a wry smile, thinking of how the Commander could be difficult at times.

"I'd love to. I was wishing we could spend more time together. It would be so great if we could work together, especially since I'm not really involved in the Timber Owls anymore, but could I do it?" she asked Xu. She nodded.

"Yeah...I just have to teach you a few things. You should be able to handle it well. And you'd be paid of course." she mentioned. Rinoa blushed.

"I already feel guilty about staying here for free." she said. Xu waved her hand.

"It doesn't matter. Just agree, because I know no-one else would be able to handle Squall for more than a couple of hours a day. Please?"

Rinoa smiled. "Sure."

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Quistis shut her eyes briefly as she sat at her wide teachers desk. The class ahead of her were silently working on the assignment she had set them, and it gave her a few minutes to think quietly. She had been given back her instructors position after it had been decided she had gained new leadership skills while on the mission which had ended in the defeat of Ultimecia.

But the new job didn't give her much time to herself. She, like the others, would not complete her own training until she was twenty-one. It was optional past the age of eighteen, but Quistis wanted to learn all she could. So she still had lessons herself from time to time,

although not as often as the others.

Looking up, she noticed a pupil looking at her. Seifer. Much to his disgust, he had been dropped a class, into hers. She wasn't sure whether or not she was able to teach him, seeing as before they had fought, with the objective of killing each other, and she had been part of a team meant to assassinate both him and the sorceress. It had been awkward for both of them, but Cid had insisted that they both try and reconcile their differences.

Cid. When he had been there. Before he had decided to abandon the Garden and stay with his wife in the Orphanage. Quistis sighed. In all fairness, he had every right to, she reproached herself. He had, after all, devoted the best part of his life to Garden, and had nearly lost his wife. He deserved a break. But, Quistis thought, he shouldn't have left all that responsibility to Squall.

Squall had accepted them without a word, when Cid announced he was leaving, everyone had assumed Squall would continue his leadership of Garden.

"Instructor?"

Quistis shook her head slightly, clearing her head of her musings.

"Yes," she said, removing her glasses. The pupil who stood in front of her desk looked nervous.

"I don't understand this." he said, showing her a problem on the paper she had handed out. Sighing a little, Quistis examined the question. She handed the paper back to the student.

"It's simple." she said, writing on the paper and showing her student what to do. The student, blushing, turned and went back to his desk. Quistis, who was glancing down at the papers on her desk, heard a soft voice utter something, and then giggles from the rest of the class. She looked up to see the student who had just spoken to her looking at Seifer with an angry expression on his face. Quistis, sensing trouble stood up.

"Sit down at your desk Clay," she ordered the student. He didn't move. Seifer smirked.

"Better do as the good instructor says. Or she might just crack that whip at you. Oh, but we all know how much you fantasize about that, don't we?" said Seifer, making an obscene gesture at the student, whose face was red. The rest of the class laughed at him. Quistis sighed. Clay rushed towards Seifer.

"Shut up! You..." the rest of his sentence was lost in gasps and the sound of chairs scraping the marble floor as Clay rushed to hit Seifer.

Seifer leapt out of his seat, leaving Clay sprawled over it as his punch missed entirely. Seifer laughed. Clay threw the chair aside and ran to Seifer with a cry of rage, attempting to strangle the taller boy. Quistis ran towards them.

"That's enough! Sit down, the pair of you!" she shouted above the

noise. Seifer dodged another attack, and managed to trip Clay over with a skillful twist. Clay fell to the floor, catching his arm painfully on an overturned chair. The rest of the SeeD's and cadets watched in astonishment. Seifer looked at Quistis, his features contorted into a mocking smile. She narrowed her icy blue eyes at him, one hand toying threateningly with the whip curled around her waist.

"Sit down." she said in a soft voice. Everyone picked up on the anger in it, and even Seifer knew well enough not to mess with Quistis when she used that tone. Her eyes still on Seifer, Quistis walked over to where Clay sat on the floor, clutching his arm.

"Is it broken?" she asked him bluntly. He looked at her, knowing he was in trouble.

"No." he said, wishing it was. Then he'd be able to escape from this situation. Quistis picked up the chair he had fallen, on, pushing it under the bench. She turned and walked back to her desk.

"Class dismissed. Seifer and Clay, I want you to stay behind." she said quietly, not looking at the class as she spoke.

Seifer and Clay stood in front of her desk. Quistis did not look at them. She arranged the papers on her desk in a calm manner, and then spoke to them in an equally calm voice.

"Seifer, I assume you started all this. Why do you see it fit to irritate everyone around you?" she asked him. He made a noise of disbelief.

"Me? He's the one who attacked me, Quistis." he said smugly. Quistis felt close to losing her temper.

"Seifer, stop playing games. This is beginning to annoy me. And you will address me with Instructor, not my first name." she said, staring at him. She felt all the familiar emotions of anger and something close to hate which she had felt while he had been their definite enemy. Seifer didn't flinch.

"Instructor." he repeated. She sighed.

"Clay, you will assist Xu with the younger cadets for the rest of today. I hope you learn to control your temper." she said wearily. Clay turned and left gratefully, giving Seifer a malevolent look as he passed him. Quistis ignored it. As soon as the door shut, she stood up and stepped over to Seifer.

"Listen to me. " she said, venom in her voice. "I don't particularly like teaching you, and I know you resent having me as your superior. And considering our past, I don't blame you. But don't demonstrate this by taking your anger out on other members of the class, especially on ones which are easy to provoke. Unlike you, Clay is usually a hard working and conscientious student. Embarrassing him, and me, in front of the class is inexcusable." She said to him. Her azure eyes flashed with anger, and Seifer found himself unable to reply. He knew she was for real.

"So what's my punishment?" he asked her, trying to sound casual. Quistis smiled tightly.

"You will assist a superior, just like Clay." she said, turning and sitting back at her desk. Seifer raised an eyebrow, and Quistis continued.

"I think the Commander can find something for you to do." she said, looking at him smugly. The cocky smile left his face.

"Quistis, you must be joking? Help Squall? I don't think so." he said in disgust. Quistis stood up again.

"Instructor." she reminded him. He shook his head and narrowed his eyes at her.

"Instructor." he repeated sarcastically. She folded her arms.

"You will do as I say. And refer to Squall Leonhart as Commander. He is your superior too." she said, not bothering to hide her smile now. Seifer scowled, and banged on the desk with his fist.

"Damn you Quistis. You won't let me forget, will you?" he rasped. She played with the end of her whip.

"No. Not after what you put us through." she replied. She turned her head away from him.

"You are dismissed." she said in a flat tone. He murmured something in disgust, and stormed out of the room.

Sinking back down into her chair, Quistis sighed, her eyes falling on the phone to her right. Picking it up, she dialed a single number. Xu answered. Quistis explained the situation, and Xu laughed when she heard Clay was going to be helping her out for the rest of the day. She told Quistis he'd be no trouble, as usually he was quiet and shy. Quistis smiled, and then told her about Seifer. Xu went quiet.

"You'd better speak to Squall himself. I don't know whether or not he'll be happy with this arrangement." she warned Quistis. She agreed.

"I know. I wanted to speak to him. Is he there?" she asked. There was a pause and Xu brought the phone into the next office and passed it over to Squall. He sounded tired as he answered.

"Quistis?" he said.

"Yes. Squall, I had to punish Seifer. Would you be able to set him some work to do in your office?" she winced as the silence on the other end stretched out. "Squall?" she asked tentatively. He sighed.

"Fine. I understand. Thanks for telling me Quistis." he said. She sighed in relief.

"I'm glad you agree Squall. Sorry about this, but he actually provoked another pupil into attacking him." she explained. Squall laughed bitterly.

"Now why aren't I surprised." he said dryly. Quistis laughed.

"Yeah, it is typical Seifer behavior." she said with a smile. Then she remembered something. "Oh, we were all going into town this evening, Rinoa's treat," she told him. She could just imagine the look of surprise on his face.

"Really? She didn't say anything to me about it," he said. Quistis twisted the ring on her finger, a smirk on her face.

"You haven't exactly seen a lot of her recently." she reminded him. He sighed.

"I know. But, I've told Xu I'll get a secretary to do all the paperwork. That should give me some more time to be with you guys and study as well." he said. Quistis laughed.

"Squall, you work too hard." she teased him. "I have to go now, some students are waiting outside for me. I'll see you later, in Balamb, alright? I'm sure one of the others will give you the details." she said, hanging up the phone. Quistis looked out over her classroom, sighing as she saw the overturned chairs.

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Fujin stood as Seifer neared her. She knew he was in a bad mood, just be the way he walked. Fujin could always tell with Seifer. They were so close. She nodded her head to him as he stopped infront of her.

"Fujin. Did you hear what that bitch Trepe has made me do?" he growled to his albino friend. The pretty girl shook her head silently. Seifer continued, his fists clenched.

"She's making me work for Squall. I gotta go to his office today, acting as his little slave for a day. Damn it! No way am I going to run around after pretty-boy Squall." He seethed, punching the air. Fujin took a deep breath.

"Don't go." she said simply. He threw his hands up in disgust.

"I must. If I don't, then she'll make me work for him longer. Xu told me it was either that or leave Garden. I haven't got a choice." he said. Fujin met his gaze with her pale grey eye.

"Choice. Leave. Why are you still here?" she added, in a softer tone. He frowned at her.

"I couldn't....I've been here since I was small. This place is my home." he said, looking down the corridor. Fujin began walking towards the entrance.

"There are always other options." she said quietly. Seifer followed her.

"What?" he asked, curious. It was not often Fujin volunteered

information or advice, and he knew it was best to listen when she did. The slim girl walked ahead of Seifer, pushing her grey hair out of her face.

"I've heard things. A group in the East. You might be interested." she said. "I can't tell you here. We'll discuss it later."  
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It was dark in the classroom, and Quistis was busy marking the papers from the test her students had done that day. The only light in the room was the small lamp on her desk, which illuminated her face, giving her an eerie look. Quistis gasped as she heard a sound in the back of the classroom, her eyes wide as she tried to see through the darkness to the back. She couldn't see past the first few rows. Uneasily, she picked up her pencil again, to continue marking the tests. Again, she was startled when she heard another noise, a rustling from the back row of the classroom.

Quistis could hear the sound of her own heartbeat quickening as she stared into the gloom. Her sharp eyes couldn't see anything. Suddenly, the door seemed a long way away. Putting down the pencil she was gripping hard, Quistis slowly got to her feet, her eyes still on the back of classroom. She glanced quickly to the space by the door, where the main light switch was. It was about seven steps away.

She felt her nerves on edge. Quistis forced herself to think rationally, that there was no-one there, that it was just her imagination. Unconsciously, she found herself unwinding the whip from around her waist. When she realized what she was doing, she curled it back, and forced herself to take a few steps towards the door. Her heart was thudding in her chest, and her mouth felt dry. She wondered why she was feeling this irrational fear, she was certainly not afraid of the dark, and had often sat in the classroom at night, marking papers.

She stared into the back, her pupils wide as she left the light from her desk. She was in the dark now, and her desk looked so safe from here. Looking to her right, she saw the light switch only a few steps away. She breathed in deeply, and ran the rest of the way to the switch.

She put her hand on the switch, and flicked it on. Welcome light flooded the room, and looking to the back of the classroom, she saw there was nothing there. Quistis didn't even have time to sigh in relief before she felt a hand clamped tightly over her mouth, and a needle was expertly pushed into her arm. Quistis' eyes opened wide in shock and terror as she felt a strange sensation spread though her.

Everything suddenly went black.  
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Sitting in the restaurant, Rinoa glanced over as the door opened. Zell sighed.

"She'll be here, don't worry," he said. Rinoa smiled weakly.

"I know. I just wanted us all to be together." she said. Squall put down his glass.

"Quistis told me I was going to have a helper today." he said. Rinoa went pale.

"R..really?" she stammered. Squall looked at her curiously, and continued.

"Yeah. Seifer. As a punishment, he has to help me in my office." Squall said. It was obvious he wasn't relishing the prospect of working with Seifer. Rinoa sighed in relief.

"Oh. That's good." she said, Zell nudged her, giving her a meaningful look. She suddenly realized.

"Oh! I mean, urgh, being with Seifer all day..." she said quickly. Squall raised an eyebrow at her over his drink. Rinoa looked away. Zell sniggered.

"Good one, Rinoa," he said mockingly. She blushed. Irvine came over, sitting on the other side of Zell.

"Where's Selphie?" Rinoa asked him. Irvine rolled his eyes.

"In the bathroom. Again. What is it with you girls?" he said dusting his hat off. Rinoa stood up, smiling.

"It's hard staying beautiful all the time." she replied, picking up her clutch purse. Irvine smiled lazily.

"But you manage it so well." he drawled. She gave him a sarcastic look and headed in the direction of the toilets. Glancing behind her, she said Squall smiling at something Irvine had just said. Rinoa smiled also, it was good to see him relax for once. Pushing open the door, she entered the ladies room, and saw Selphie standing in front of a huge mirror at the end of it.

"Selph?" she said quietly. Selphie looked at Rinoa's reflection without turning round. Rinoa stepped towards her.

"Is something wrong?" she asked. Selphie shook her head, taking a lipstick out of her purse.

"I was just...thinking. About Irvine." she said. Rinoa nodded and smiled knowingly.

"Ah. I should have guessed." she said. Selphie sighed.

"I know, I know...nothing new. But I just wish...he'd stop playing around and just ask me out. Is it too much to ask? Or does he really just want to be friends? I can't figure him out!" she complained, applying the lipstick. Rinoa watched her silently. Selphie continued.

"I've dropped enough hints to him myself. I'd have thought he'd have got the message by now." Selphie said in a depressed tone. Rinoa smiled sympathetically at her.

"Selph, I know how you feel. You know how long it took Squall! But Irvine...I think under all that flirting, he is really just too shy to tell you how he really feels." she said softly. Selphie turned around to face her.

"You think?" she asked, her emerald eyes wide. Rinoa nodded.

"Of course. Why don't you ask him outright when you're alone? So he doesn't feel he has to pretend?" she said. Selphie smiled to herself.

"Um, yeah, that might work. Thanks Rinoa!" she said, hugging her friend. Rinoa patted her back.

"No problem. Lets get back to them, make sure they're not ordering for us like last time." she said, wincing as she remembered how Zell had ordered hotdogs for all six of them. The two left the bathroom, walking back to the guys.

"Hey," said Irvine, looking at Selphie and smiling. She slid into the space next to him, sitting close. He casually draped his arms around her shoulders. Rinoa grinned conspiratorially at Selphie, and the two giggled. Squall handed Rinoa the menu.

"It's quite expensive here. Are you sure you want to pay? I'll go halves with you," Squall offered quietly. Rinoa shook her head.

"It's my treat. I insist." she reassured him. He shrugged.

"I wonder what time Quistis will get here? She's almost half an hour late," he said, glancing at the silver watch on his wrist. Rinoa scanned the menu.

"I guess we'd better order for her." she said. Squall detected a hint of worry in her voice.

"I'm sure she's fine, Rinoa. Quistis can take care of herself, and besides, this isn't Deling City. It's safe around here," he said. She smiled weakly at him, and he took her hand under the table, squeezing gently. She looked into his eyes, knowing he was trying to make her feel better. Squall was never one for public displays of affections, although Rinoa wouldn't had objected to them. But she was content with his subtle ways of showing he cared. She sighed, releasing his hand, and glanced at the door again, willing Quistis to step through.

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Quistis tried opening her eyes, but realized they were taped shut.

She was finding it hard to breath, she was cramped, with her knees close to her chest. She could feel that her long blonde hair was loose, and it hung over her face. She was terrified, she was completely defenseless. It as dark, and she could feel a strange vibration. Eventually, she realized that she was in some kind of vehicle.

Suddenly, the motion stopped, and there was light around her. Quistis froze, trying desperately to open her eyes. She felt rough hands on her body, and felt someone tying rope around her ankles and wrists, pulling the knots very tight so it bit into her skin. Then the tape was ripped from her eyes, and she cried out in pain, partly at the sensation of tearing, but mostly at the blinding light. Her eyes gradually adjusted to the light, and she realized Fujin was standing over her. The younger girl looked stony, her face expressionless.

"F...Fujin," she started, her mouth feeling dry. Fujin looked at her without speaking. Quistis felt inexplicable tears springing to her eyes. "Fujin...what is going on?" she asked, her voice hoarse. Fujin raised her pinwheel, leveling it at Quistis' throat.

"Silence." she commanded. Quistis looked at Fujin, her cornflower-blue eyes wide. Fujin had no sympathy. Quistis watched in mounting waves of terror as Fujin prepared a syringe, filling it with a clear fluid from a bottle. She laid it to one side, and took another, larger syringe. Quistis tensed as Fujin expertly inserted the needle into Quistis' upper arm, drawing a sample of blood, putting it in a tube. Then Fujin turned back to Quistis, a glint in her eye.

"Sleep." she said softly, injecting Quistis once more. Quistis moaned a little as the needle entered her, feeling the pain once more spreading from her arm to the rest of her body as she was injected with the drug. Then she fell unconscious.

Fujin sighed, and looked over to where Seifer was standing. He smiled at her, and crossed over to the boot of the car, looking at Quistis as if she was some kind of prize.

"Beautiful." he murmured, stroking the unconscious girls hair, passing his fingers over her face. "This is perfect." he hissed. Fujin smiled.

"You are going through with it then?" she asked him. Seifer looked at her sharply.

"Of course." he answered her. Fujin collected the tube of Quistis' blood and but it in a labeled envelope.

"Good. I'll tell them everything is ready." she said. Seifer smiled, and lifted Quistis out of the boot of the car. Her body was limp, but the slender girl was easy to carry as she was quite light. Her loose hair fell over Seifer as he held her, smiling down malevolently at his trophy.

"Now everything will be perfect." he said.

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Squall gave Rinoa a meaningful look as the bill for their meal arrived. She smiled at him, almost smugly, and opened the little leather leaflet, preventing him from seeing it. Then she wrote the cheque out in her pretty, looping handwriting, putting it with her credit card back in the book before he could see the amount. Squall sighed.

"Are going to tell us your news now?" he asked her. Rinoa grinned at Selphie, who already knew. Squall gazed at her expectantly. She stared back at him, holding his cool gaze.

"I've been offered a job." she began. Squall looked disappointed.

"Are you going away from Garden?" he asked quickly, anxiety showing in his eyes, but not in his voice. She shook her head, touched by his concern.

"No. Squall, I'm going to be you new secretary!" she said. He opened his mouth in surprise, and she smiled at him.

"That...that's great!" he said. Rinoa put her arms around his neck, kissing him lightly on the cheek before hugging him.

"I'm glad you're pleased. It's going to be so fun, working together. Of course, we won't be together all the time, I'll be running your errands and you'll be in classes, but it'll give us a lot more time together!" she said in his ear. He smiled, and stroked her long black hair.

"I know. I'm really happy, Rinoa." he said quietly. Rinoa pulled away, looking into his dusky blue eyes. He smiled at her. She looked down at the table, picking up her coffee cup.

"I wonder where Quistis got to? I wanted her to be here when I told everyone." she said quietly. Squall shrugged.

"She's probably working hard, marking tests or something. I'll make sure to check on her tonight before going to the dorms. You want to come with me?" he asked her. She smiled and nodded.

"Yes. That'd put my mind at ease." she replied.

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It was after curfew when they got back to the Garden, and the new Garden faculty members patrolling the Garden gave the SeeD's reproaching looks as they passed. They didn't comment on their rule-breaking, as they were with the Commander. There was silence in the sleeping Garden, with the only sound Selphie's and Rinoa's high heels clicking as they walked down the marble corridors. Squall had his arm around Rinoa as they walked, and he was enjoying the

closeness for once. Selphie and Irvine were also walking close, and Selphie was watching her two friends a little jealously. She wished Irvine would get the guts to tell her how he felt.

When they reached the dormitories, Squall and Rinoa said goodnight to the others, and proceeded to Quistis' room on the second floor, where all the instructors slept. Squall knocked on the door lightly, seeing a light on inside. There was no reply. Checking to see if it was locked, he pushed the door open. Rinoa went in first.

"Quisty?" she called softly. There was silence. Passing through the office section of the small room, she knocked on the door connecting the tiny desk space to her bedroom. Not hearing anything, she pushed the door open. Stepping into the darkness, Rinoa could see from the thin bar of light shining on the bed that it was empty. She turned back to Squall, who was waiting in the other room.

"She's not here," said Rinoa, a hint of anxiety in her voice. Squall looked unperturbed.

"Maybe she's still in the classroom," he suggested, but felt a little uneasy. It was almost midnight. Rinoa frowned. She knew it was unlikely.

"Lets go," she said softly, pushing past Squall and switching off the light. He followed her as she walked briskly down the dimly lit corridor to the abandoned classroom, her heels clicking loudly in rhythm on the polished floor. He followed her, opening the door to the classroom as she stood behind him. He didn't know why, but like her, he felt reluctant to enter the room.

It appeared empty. The lamp on Quistis' desk was still on, and from it they could see papers scattered across her desk. Rinoa stepped infront of Squall, and switched on the main light. Brightness flooded the room, and the pair gazed around it silently. It was empty. Rinoa turned back to Squall, her mouth open to say something, but her foot nudged something, sending it skidding over to him with a tinkling sound. He bent down and picked it up, examining it. It was a small glass bottle, one of those used to fill a syringe. Rinoa crossed the room back to him, looking at what he held. It wasn't labeled, but there were a few drops of clear fluid still remaining in the ampoule. Squall looked concerned.

"Rinoa..." he began, his mind going through the possibilities of what may have happened at a furious rate. Rinoa looked terrified.

"Squall...where is she?" she asked him, her voice high pitched. He looked at her, his azure eyes full of anxiety.

"I don't know. Somethings happened to her."  
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Quistis awoke again on an unfamiliar bed, with harsh lights shining on her. She opened her eyes easily this time, and realized she was in

a hospital, or what looked like one. She tried to sit up, but when she attempted to move her arms, she realized she was wearing thick restraining straps. Her eyes widened in shock, and she tried to move her legs. They too were strapped to the bed. She gasped as she heard a low laugh from the side. She turned her head, trying not to let the strap across her throat restrict her breathing anymore than it already was.

Seifer sat in the chair, his unsheathed gunblade on his lap. He stood as she looked at him, walking over to her with deliberate slowness and menace. He stopped a few feet from her bed.

"My dear Instructor." he said mockingly. Her eyes narrowed as she looked at him. She was determined not to show fear in front of him, one of her students. He smiled at her.

"I'm afraid this will be a very one-sided conversation....some surgery was performed. While you were having a little nap." he said. Quistis tried not to think about what he may be implying, and didn't attempt to say anything. She felt normal..but she couldn't be sure what had been done to her. Seifer touched her cheek tenderly.

"Quistis...you are very lucky. So many would die for the opportunity you have. And you just get given it..something so many have given their whole lives to have." he said wistfully. She shut her eyes, wondering what he meant.

"I will help you. Don't worry, Quistis," he said to her. Seifer stepped close, bending over her so she could feel his breath on her lips. He kissed her gently.

"I'll be your knight." he whispered.  
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Squall crossed the room to where Rinoa was sitting, her head in her hands. He rubbed her back lightly, and she looked up at him. He could see how worried she was.

"Have they found anything?" she asked hoarsely. He shook his head.

"No. I've sent a fresh team out. It's only been a few hours. We'll find her, I promise." he reassured her. She stood up, turned away from him.

"You shouldn't promise something you don't know for certain you can do." she said bitterly. He sighed, knowing she wasn't really angry at him. He put both hands on her shoulders, pulling her against him.

"Don't worry. We can't do any more than we are now." he said quietly. Rinoa looked around the office, gazing at the Seed's answering phones, sending faxes, speaking into radios. Everyone was busy looking for Quistis. Rinoa took Squall's hand, pushing his sleeve up

so she could see his watch. It was three in the morning. Looking up at him, she smiled weakly.

"I'm sorry Squall. I know you're worried too." she said. He sighed.

"I just can't believe no one noticed." he said bitterly. Rinoa hugged him.

"I know." she said softly. Squall hugged her close. For once, he wasn't shy about showing affection in front of the other SeeD's. They were both too worried, and everyone else was too busy to notice.

Selphie ran into the room. Rinoa and Squall separated as she neared them.

"They found something. Some of the SeeD's checked the parking lot, and one of the cars is missing. There is no record of who took it!" she said excitedly. Squall looked at her intently.

"Did anyone see the car leave?" he asked. Selphie shook her head and looked downcast.

"One of the juniors reported hearing a car leave at about ten thirty. All the other cars are there. It's strange, but he said it seemed to be heading away from Balamb town, in the other direction." she told him. Squall turned to the team of SeeD's who were waiting to his right expectantly.

"I want a team to go to the Fire Cavern, now. Another check the Rinauld Coast for signs of a boat." he ordered. The SeeD's immediately did as he said. He turned back to the others.

"We'll find her. Once the SeeD car is discovered, we can track her down." he said. Selphie nodded, and walked over to another SeeD who was making notes. Squall looked at Rinoa. The girl was gazing out of the large window which made up one side of his office, staring into the blackness. He sighed. He sincerely hoped they found Quistis, soon.

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Seifer had left the room. Quistis now noticed two figures standing in the other corner. They appeared to be wearing masks, and were a little scary-looking. Quistis stared at them as they walked over to her.

"Your Excellency." they hissed at her. Quistis' glacial-blue eyes misted in confusion.

"We hope to release you soon, your Excellency." they said in simpering voices. Quistis tried to talk, but all that she could do was make a gasping sound. In horror, she realized what Seifer had said was true. There was something horribly wrong with her voice. Frantically, she twisted, attempting to free herself as the things

moved closer. There were no coverings on her, and she could feel the straps biting into her flesh as she tried to free herself. She moaned as she felt a sharp pain in her stomach, accompanied by a sensation of warm fluid trickling down near her navel. She tried to raise her head, and before her strength gave out, she saw something which terrified her. A huge row of ugly black stitches held her bruised reddened flesh together in her stomach, holding together an ugly looking gash which she had inadvertently split open. She waved her arms wildly, making the bed shake. Her sapphire eyes were wide open as she kept the image of her ruined flesh in her mind, possibilities of what may have been done to her flashing through her mind.

The things hissed at her as she struggled. Quistis tried to scream as they reached out to her with dirty hands, long fingers stroking her, touching her all over. She writhed as they caressed her, trying to calm her down, while muttering to themselves all the time.

"Excellency...please...do not hurt yourself..." one of them hissed. Quistis tried to hit them away, but as her hands were so tightly restrained to the bed, she was unable to hurt them. She tried to scream, longing even for Seifer to rescue her as the hideous things stroked her body, patted her head, putting their hands over her chest and legs.

"Soon...your Excellency..soon you will be free." they said, trying to hush her. Their words were spoken soothingly, with an insidious quality to them. They eventually drew away from her, and she calmed down. She shut her eyes as she heard the door shut, and finally, allowed the tears to come.

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Squall walked briskly towards the shore. In the silvery grey light of dawn, he looked like a mythical warrior, the pale light glinting off his gunblade and his hair blowing in the breeze. His aqua blue eyes were set in determination, fixed on the boat waiting ahead. He was walking so fast, Rinoa, Selphie and the others had trouble keeping up with his long strides.

They piled into the boat after him, which was steered by a young female SeeD, Kali. She saluted Squall as he entered, and gave him a brief report on what had been found and where they were headed. Squall nodded, and the five sat down as Kali powered up the vessel, and it sped towards it's destination. Rinoa sat beside Squall.

"Where are we going?" she asked him. He sighed.

"Esthar. After we made contact with the President earlier on, we discovered several people saw a young woman being carried by a man to another car. I think it was her, the woman was unconscious. The people who saw her used a telescope to see them, as they were far away from the city. The man...his description matches Seifer." Squall said reluctantly. Rinoa and the others gasped.

"Seifer? That ass-hole kidnapped Quistis!?" Zell yelled. Irvine looked disgusted.

"What are we going to do Squall?" he asked. Squall looked exasperated.

"There isn't much we can do. Quistis is in Esthar. We just go there and disperse SeeD's from Esthar Garden to find her. We have the headmaster's complete support." he said. He sighed.

"Let's just hope we find her soon. Seifer has always been unpredictable. Who knows what the hell he's up to know." Squall said, putting his head in his hand. Rinoa put her arm around his shoulders.

"It'll be alright Squall." she said softly. The others looked away from them.

"Now we know where she is, it won't be long before we can get her safely back home." she said to him. He nodded.

"I know. Just...Seifer's involved. Why is he always intent on causing trouble? First he tried to take you from me...and now Quistis..." he said. Rinoa sighed.

"Everything will be fine." she told, but there wasn't much conviction in her voice. If she was honest, there was no where better to hide than Esthar.

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Rinoa dreamt as she slept. It was uneasy sleep, but essential, as she hadn't slept in over 24 hours. She dreamt of a field of flowers, much like the one she and Squall had made their promise in. But this time, she was there with another. Quistis. Rinoa spoke to her.

"Why are you here?" Rinoa asked her. Quistis gazed at her, her eyes glistening damply, like wet forget-me-nots. Rinoa felt her heart ache.

"What are you trying to tell me?" she asked desperately. Rinoa knew this wasn't just a dream. Since she became a Sorceress, she had many dreams where she communicated with others, some who were even from another time. But never one of her friends.

"Quistis, talk to me. I'll listen, I'll remember." she pleaded with her blonde friend. Quistis looked at her sadly, and raised a hand to her throat. Rinoa frowned in confusion.

"Quistis, are you hurt? Can you speak?" she asked gently. Quistis bit her lip. Rinoa tried again.

"Are you hurt?" she asked. Quistis nodded slowly. Rinoa felt an ache in the back of her throat.

"Did Seifer hurt you?" she asked, her voice trembling. Quistis shook

her head violently. Rinoa was surprised. Then she felt a strange tingling sensation, and she knew the dream was coming to an end.

"Quistis..you must try to contact me again, ok? I can listen to you, you can help me find you!" Rinoa cried, as the image of Quistis slowly faded. Then she found herself back in empty sleep, dreamless sleep.

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Quistis cried in her sleep. She desperately wanted to talk to Rinoa, but couldn't. She moved her hands slowly, fresh tears springing to her eyes as the sores on her wrists and ankles bled even more. The rough, hairy rope which made the restraining straps was cruelly tight, and bit into her flesh causing blisters and sores which were unable to heal.

The door to the room opened, and Quistis tried her hardest to look over. Seifer bent over her, and she breathed a sigh of relief. He smiled tenderly at her.

"My beautiful Quistis." he murmured. She felt uneasy. She didn't like Seifer, but anything was better than those things which had molested her earlier. She looked at him questioningly. His blue eyes met hers, and he smiled again.

"I guess you are wondering why you are here," he said, drawing away. She nodded slightly.

"It is because, my love, you have been chosen for a great honor. Have you heard of Queen Oriscala?" he said. The name seemed to hang in the air, and Quistis went pale. Seifer gazed down at her trembling body with a hint of contempt.

"You are to be her soulmate. Her twin. She will be re-awakened in you, Quistis. And I shall be your Protector." he said with joy. Quistis' breath became rapid, and she went very white. Unlike most, she knew about Queen Oriscala. Quistis had never taught any students about this great Sorceress, as the tales were deemed unsuitable for teenagers. Because they were so horrifying. Quistis could not imagine what would happen if she were to be in the same body as her.

Seifer looked at Quistis appreciatively. He rested a hand on her naked, swollen stomach. She hissed in pain as his fingers brushed the torn bruised skin. He stroked the hot skin gently, laughing softly. He undid another button on her shirt, as it was covering some of her stitches, pushing back the fabric. Quistis looked at him, concerned as to what his intentions were. At this point, she didn't know what Seifer was capable of. When he undid another of her buttons, she shut her eyes, trying not to cry. But then he stopped, and stepped away from her.

"Soon, Quistis." he promised her. She looked at him, her eyes wide with silent pleading. He laughed again, and left the room, shutting the white door behind him, and leaving Quistis lying there, her heart

thumping, and her breath rapid as she wondered what horror was waiting for her.

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Rinoa awoke with a jolt as the boat skipped over a wave and came down sharply. She was thrown against Squall, and put her hand on his chest to steady herself. He looked at her with a smile. She looked out the window, and saw the sun shining brightly.

"Squall, Quistis is hurt," she said. The smile left his face.

"How do you know?" he asked her, his voice low. Rinoa looked upset.

"I dreamt of her. I spoke to her. She said Seifer didn't hurt her, but she was injured all the same. She's scared, Squall, she doesn't know where she is." Rinoa said, her voice trembling. Squall shook his head.

"I...you spoke to her? " he said, confused. Rinoa felt impatient.

"Squall, I've had dreams like this before. Since I got my powers. I didn't want to tell you before, but this is my special power. Edea must have had it also, the ability to communicate with others through dreams. I can. I spoke to her!" she said. Squall nodded.

"Ok. Is she...hurt badly?" he asked, hardly wanting to know the answer. Rinoa shrugged.

"I don't know. She was unable to speak, maybe they've gagged her. I don't know." she said, looking depressed. Squall stood up, and walked to the window. He stared out to the ocean, the waves flashing past as they flew over then at high speed. In the distance, he could see land.

Glancing back at the anxious Rinoa, and his sleeping friends, he wondered what he was to do. The first step was to get the co-operation of the Esthar government, to ensure they had all available resources to find Quistis at their disposal. It shouldn't be hard, seeing as his father was the President. Squall was still worried though, now he knew Quistis was in danger for certain. He sighed, and closed his eyes as he leant his scarred forehead against the cool glass. He was broken out of his depression by Kali, who called him from the control room.

"Commander, we're nearing land now." she said to him. He nodded at her, murmuring a thanks. He turned to wake the others.

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Laguna was glad to see his son. Squall had avoided talking to him for so long, he was so happy that finally there was going to be some contact. Ellone watched him pace up and down, a weary look on her face.

"Uncle Laguna, you're going to wear a hole in the carpet." she said dryly. He looked at her and smiled warmly.

"Elle, I'm so glad he's finally coming to see me!" Laguna said. Ellone felt slightly guilty on Squall's behalf.

"Uncle Laguna...I don't think he's here to talk. Don't get your hopes up, please," she said, not wanting him to get hurt. She herself had been a little annoyed at her adopted younger brother, and the fact he seemed determined to keep his father at arms length. But Ellone knew Squall was busy, and that he needed time to adjust. She stood up, and crossed the room to Laguna.

"Look...maybe there will be some time to talk. But don't pressurize him. Finding out he had family was a big shock to Squall..." she said gently. Laguna sighed.

"I guess. I just want to explain. And to tell him about his mother." Laguna said. Ellone smiled weakly.

"Yea. I know. But don't force him. I don't know him too well myself yet, but from what I've seen I guess he's not too good at opening up to others." she said. Laguna nodded.

"Okay." he said, checking his watch for the hundredth time that day. Ellone smiled.  
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"She's sleeping." said Lika, striking a match. Her companions moved closer as she lit the fire.

"She's strong." hissed Hari, prodding the ashes in the extinguished fire with his long fingers before throwing on some new wood. Lika laughed, a dry, rasping sound.

"Soon the fool Laguna will fall, and Oriscala will reign once more." she muttered, rubbing her cold hands together over the flames which licked up from the fresh fire.

From the dark corner of the cave, Fujin watched the hideous group. The two ring leaders could barely be called human. Fujin herself was disgusted with them. She had found this group when she and Raijin had been traveling to the Lunatic Pandora, to find Seifer. Fujin felt a tinge of sadness as she thought of Raijin, but pushed it out of her head quickly. He was dead, had been killed in the training center in Galbadia Garden. Fujin never mourned his loss, some called her cold hearted, but she preferred to think of it as her ability to handle grief better than others.

Shifting slightly, the girl laid her head down on the cold rock. Her

chin length grey hair fell over her good eye, and she pushed it away. Next to her lay Seifer. She gazed at him as he stared up at the ceiling of the cave. Fujin smiled despite herself. She truly loved Seifer. He was her idol, her hero. She would do anything to ensure his success. Seifer seemed to notice that she was examining her. He turned his head towards her. They were lying close, and were sharing a thin blanket. He put an arm around her waist, pulling her closer to him.

"Fujin..." he murmured, kissing her violently. Fujin opened her eye wide as he kissed her, putting her free arm around him, pulling him closer. He pulled away, and she, breathless, gazed into his face.

"You're so good to me." he said to her, stroking her face. She smiled at him, feeling her heart beating fast from excitement. She shivered as he pulled her tight, pressing her against him.

"Seifer..." she said, her face flushed. He looked into her colourless eye, stroking her silky grey hair. "Seifer..don't.." she said, but her protest was lost in another passionate kiss. Fujin relented as Seifer moved over her.

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"Squall! I'm so glad you made it!" said Laguna, jumping out of his chair to pat his son on the back. Squall looked back coldly, but without malice.

"President Laguna." Squall began. Laguna interrupted him.

"Call me Dad."

"President Laguna." Squall repeated. Laguna bit his lip, scratching the back of his head awkwardly.

"As you know, one of Balamb Garden's Instructors was abducted last night. Not only is she an Instructor, but she was a member of the team who defeated Ultimecia, and one of my closest friends." he said. Laguna looked at him sympathetically.

"I'll do whatever I can to help." Laguna said sincerely.

"Thank-you. We'd like your co-operation in searching for Instructor Treppe, and help in following up the leads we already have." Squall said in a flat voice. Ellone stood silently behind him. He hadn't seen her as he entered the room, and she was now glaring at him. She stepped forward.

"For God's sake Squall." she said angrily. He spun around, his cold look softening as he saw her.

"Ellone...Sis..." he murmured. He could never quite believe it when he saw her. She looked at him reproachfully.

"Please, Squall...I know you are worried about you friends, but do you have to be so cruel?" she said honestly. Squall stared at her open-mouthed.

"I mean...he's offering you help. He wants to get closer to you. And you are so cold and rude..I know thats not the real you Squall." she said pleadingly, walking closer to him, her brown eyes warm with affection and innocence. Squall melted a little at his older sisters words.

"Elle..what can I say? I don't know you." he said, looking at Laguna. Laguna, for once, was silent. Ellone sighed.

"Squall, listen to what Uncle Laguna has to say. He justs wants you to know about your mother, and to get to know you better. Please?" she asked softly, putting her hand on his arm. He sighed, and turned to Laguna.

"I'm sorry. I find this situation...difficult. I will listen to you, I promise. I do want to know more about my family, and to know that I wasn't just an accident. But...my priority is Quistis. I must find her." he said, emotion finally showing in his voice. Laguna nodded.

"I understand. You do what you have to do. I'll support you all the way." Laguna promised. Ellone smiled, and hugged Squall gently. He felt a bit awkward. The only other people who hugged him were Selphie (who usually threw her arms around his neck, threatening to cause him injury and squeezed him dangerously tight) and Rinoa, whose hugs always meant something else. Usually that she was upset, or that she wanted him to know something. Ellone just exuded love.  
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When Quistis woke the next day, she realized she was now in a sitting position. Her arms were pinned above her shoulders to the wall behind her, by ropes, and her legs were still bound to the corners of the bed. She dreaded to think what was planned for her, especially as she was in this position. After the encounter with Seifer yesterday, she was afraid for herself. She didn't know what he, or those creatures, were capable of.

And she was starving. She had a IV inserted in her hand, but she hadn't been fed. She shifted as much as she could in the bed, wishing she could move properly. But now, she did have to opportunity to look down at herself properly, to see what had been done to her. Her stomach looked hideous. The normally flat, taut flesh was purpley-red, bruised and torn over the huge gash which was held together with clumsy black stitches. It was cut diagonal, and she guessed over her appendix. It was to one side of her navel, and mostly below it. She could see the track of blood from where she had burst the stitches the last night.

She moaned as she looked at it, dreading to think what had been done inside that she couldn't see. Her peach coloured top had been

unbuttoned completely while she slept, and the bottom of it was drenched in dried blood. It gave her the chance to view the extent of her surgery completely, and upset her to think that someone had been touching her while she slept. Probably Seifer, she thought angrily, thankful that she was still wearing her bra and skirt.

Quistis felt so tired and angry, she found herself crying again. She was furious, and scared at the same time. This time, when the door opened, she didn't attempt to hide the fact she was upset. It was Seifer, as she had guessed. He smiled at her, and wiped away her tears gently with one finger.

"Poor Quistis." he said softly. She pulled her head away from his touch angrily. He looked hurt.

"Quistis...I'm not here to hurt you." he said to her. He sat on the bed next to her, and put a hand on her shoulder, massaging gently.

"I wont hurt you." he said again in a low voice. His dark blue eyes seemed to burn into her arctic sapphire ones. Quistis felt a cold sense of fear creep over her. He seemed like a predator, and she felt vulnerable, helpless. She felt a tear streak down her face as he pushed apart her blouse, trailing his hand down from her shoulder. Quistis cried silently as Seifer confirmed her worst fears. He was going to rape her, and she couldn't stop him. She was unable to defend herself. She stared to the ceiling as he touched her intimately, trying to block out the sense of disgust and terror as he got onto the bed with her. Desperately, she wished she had never punished him in the classroom, wished she had turned a blind eye to him and Clay. But it was too late. He was going to punish her instead.  
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Fujin stood outside the room, her eyes shut. She knew what Seifer was doing, and she told herself she didn't care. She forced herself to remain cold, to not think about it. She didn't feel guilty about the violation, but only a little upset that she herself was not enough for Seifer. Fujin took a deep breath as she heard a choked moan from Quistis inside the room, and took a few steps away from the door. She wondered whether Seifer loved her. She knew he could never love her in the same, selfless way she loved him, but she sometimes wished her love was requited.

Fujin gazed around the small, clinical corridor which connected the laboratory to the cave. It was cold in here, and she shivered. She sat down in a blue plastic chair which was beside the door, first moving it so she was quite far from the door, so she wouldn't be able to hear what was going on. Angrily, she buried her fingers in her hair, wishing she could get rid of this bad feeling inside her. Seifer.

She sighed, and let her hands drop to her lap, hugging her stomach as if it hurt. She hated feeling emotions beyond her control. She didn't know what this one was. Fujin tried to rationalize her thoughts, but

still came up with nothing. She loved Seifer. She wanted him to just be happy. Was she upset that she was unable to do that? Was she jealous of the attraction Quistis held for him? She didn't know. She heard a scuttling noise, and one of the small dwarf-like people came out of the caves. Fujin stood, making sure her Pinwheel was clearly visible. The small thing got closer to the girl, and she looked down at it with contempt. It gazed up at her, and hissed.

"Mistress Fujin. Please, we need to attend to the Sorceresssss." Fujin could tell it was one of Lika's underlings. Fujin gazed above it, staring into the distance, glowering through her snow white eyelashes.

"The Sorceress is busy." she said harshly. The thing, which she now knew as Rigard, one of the females, recoiled from her harsh tone. The pretty girl sighed, and turned back to the white door. She heard a hideous guttural moan come from it, and turned back to the thing. Rigard was staring at her.

"The Sorceresss....we must get her sssoon!" Rigard hissed, reaching out to Fujin with a long hand. Fujin stepped away, out of its reach, dropping her Pinwheel to the same level as Rigards outstretched hand.

"Do not touch me." Fujin said in a low voice. Rigard gave Fujin a malevolent look, and scuttled away. Fujin realized she still had a look of disgust on her face, and quickly turned it into an indifferent look. Soon, she knew Quistis wouldn't exist anymore. There would be only Oriscala. And then she, Fujin, would be forgotten.

Fujin pressed a hand to her eye, willing tears to come, but she knew they wouldn't. Fujin Athen never cried. She was tough, she was cold. She had never cried since she was a baby. Not even when she lost her eye in a training accident. Fujin was Ice. Harsh, cold, and indifferent. She could not care about the affections of one man.

But she did. And she couldn't stop herself.  
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"Caves? Why would Doctor Odine have his laboratory in caves?" asked Selphie. The young technician sighed.

"He doesn't. Dr Mitchell has his laboratory in the caves. It is meant to be a secret. That's why." he replied. Selphie nodded.

"So...tell me about him." she said, smiling charmingly at the technician. He smiled back.

"You want to know about him? Why? Hoping for a date?" he asked her slyly. She fluttered her eyelashes at him, taking a step closer.

"Maybe not with him." she said softly. The technician gulped.

"But please. Humor me. Why is he not working with Dr Odine anymore?" She asked. He licked his lips.

"He...ah...they had an argument. I heard it. It was about this new invention. Dr Odine wanted to destroy it. It was something...a crystal...which could bring back a Sorceress into the body of someone who physically resembles them." he said, staring at Selphie's chest. She knew this, and folded her arms, making him look at her face again.

"Bring back a Sorceress? Like Ultimecia?" she asked innocently. He shook his head.

"No. A Sorceress from the past. Like Hyne." he said. Selphie smiled flirtatiously.

"Why would you want to do that?" she asked. He shook his head again.

"You wouldn't. Hyne was a good Sorceress, but there is no reason to bring her back. But, there is a possibility that they would bring back some other Sorceress. Like...."

"Who? The only bad Sorceress' I know are Adel and Ultimecia. And it is impossible to bring them back. Adels in suspended animation, and Ultimecia's dead in the future." she said. The technician suddenly looked serious.

"There's Oriscala." he said. Selphie touched his arm gently.

"Who?" she asked, feigning disinterest. He swallowed hard.

"Oriscala. She was the most evil...hideous Sorceress ever. She used black magic, summoned demons, forced the people to make regular sacrifices to her. Of blood. She murdered and tortured thousands for her own pleasure. She...she was terrible." he said. Selphie looked a little worried.

"She could be brought back?" she asked quietly. The technician sighed.

"I don't know. The Crystal Ashen was destroyed. But the plans for it...Dr Mitchell has them. And he's crazy. I wouldn't put it past him..." he said with a shiver. Selphie felt cold.

"What...you said someone who resembled the Sorceress physically...what did Oriscala look like?" she asked, her voice unsteady. The technician smiled wistfully.

"Deceptively beautiful. She was, according to ancient texts, very slim, tall, blonde, with striking blue eyes." he said. Selphie felt weak. He seemed to notice.

"Hey...are you alright?" he asked her. She looked up at him, her face pale.

"Gotta go," said Selphie, and ran from the room.

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Again, Rinoa dreamed of Quistis. She was facing Quistis, who had her back to Rinoa. Quistis was kneeling in the long grass of the meadow, picking flowers and crying violently. Rinoa felt strangely scared. She walked quickly over to Quistis, and put a hand on her shoulder. Quistis screamed and jumped up, running a few steps away from Rinoa, before seeing who it was.

"Quistis!" Rinoa said anxiously. Quistis took a deep breath.

"Help me." she said quietly. Rinoa sighed in relief.

"You can talk." she said. Quistis bit her lip.

"Please Rinoa. Hurry and find me. You don't know what's happened...." she broke off, hugging the flowers close to her chest. Rinoa noticed the cut on her bare stomach, and saw Quistis torn clothes which were saturated with dried blood.

"What happened?" she asked. Quistis looked down at herself.

"Seifer..." she whispered. Rinoa frowned.

"I thought...you said he didn't hurt you." She said softly. Quistis let the flowers fall from her arms as she hugged her self.

"He hadn't. Then." she mumbled. Rinoa felt a terrible sense of realization creep over her.

"Quistis, what did he do to you?!" she asked in a low voice. Quistis just looked at her.

"The worst." she stated simply, incredible sadness in her voice. Rinoa felt tears running down her cheeks.

"No, Quistis...I'm so sorry.." she said. Quistis touched the deep cut on her stomach anxiously.

"He didn't do this though. I don't know who did, but he didn't." she said. Rinoa looked confused.

"I don't know....just hang in there, alright? We'll find you..soon, I promise. Just wait for us. Don't give up." she said, not really knowing how to comfort her friend. Quistis didn't look at Rinoa, she just stared down at her disfigured stomach.

"Quistis...I have to go now." Rinoa said calmly, feeling the tingling sensation which meant she was waking up. Quistis remained unmoving.

"We'll find you soon, I promise." Rinoa said desperately. Quistis nodded sadly, and turned away, fading before Rinoa's eyes.  
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"Tonight." cried Hari, his black eyes gleaming in the firelight. Lika hissed, a joyous sound, as she threw a bunch of herbs onto the fire.

"Sssorceress Orisssscala...we will worship her..." she slithered. There was a chorus of moans from the hooded figures behind her, the followers of Lika and Hari.

Fujin watched the gathering with contempt. She knew that when Orisscala finally was resurrected, she would not bother with these rejects of society. She would only want the affections of the beautiful and strong. Like Seifer. He had already decided he was to be her knight. Fujin would in turn wait on Seifer. It was like an unspoken agreement between the two. She was his, and she always would be. But she had no rights over him.

Fujin tossed her weapon up in the air, catching it deftly with one hand. She smoothed the blue tunic down over her hips, and glanced over to the tunnel which connected the caves to the laboratory. That fool of a doctor was still in there, working on Quistis, adjusting the Crystal Ashen. Seifer had administered the drug to her again, and Quistis had been unconscious for the last five hours.

Seifer himself was sleeping. Fujin had checked on him earlier. She herself was not tired, she never needed much sleep. Sighing, Fujin sat down on a flat rock and watched as the dwarf-like people danced in the firelight, chanting hideously. She thought their devotion to this mythical Sorceress was strange, as there was no way the Sorceress would be interested in them. Fujin itched for some combat, she was in that kind of mood. She just wanted to attack one of them. They irritated her, and she longed to show them she was superior to them. Even though they groveled to her whenever they spoke to her, Fujin had the feeling they didn't really respect her with the fear they had for Seifer.  
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Quistis looked at the doctor silently as he worked. From time to time he glanced up at her face, but he was always expressionless. Quistis tried to keep her mind a blank. He had given her an anaesthetic, which was just as well, because she could see everything he was doing to her, and if she wasn't drugged to the gills, she would probably be screaming.

He was inside her stomach. Not only that, but there was something very wrong with her. She could see, from her sitting position, that there was something inside her stomach. Even though it was covered in blood, it was shining with an inner light, and was a pale blue colour. This the doctor appeared to be working on. He looked up at her. She gazed back.

"You are so lucky." he said to her. Quistis ignored him. He continued. "You...chosen to become the greatest Sorceress ever...it's amazing. Tonight, I will switch on the Crystal Ashen, and you and Oriscala will become one." he said, joy in his voice. Quistis turned her face to the side so he couldn't see her. She was beginning to feel a dull pain in her stomach, and she knew the anaesthetic was wearing off.

"You will soon be able to talk. The Crystal Ashen needed your silence to grow. Only then could it thrive, off your frustration and anger. Seifer certainly aided it in that respect." he said, smirking at her. Quistis squeezed her eyes shut, thankful that she was so doped up she couldn't get as angry as she would have liked. Eventually, the doctor finished, and replaced the stitches, more delicately this time.

"I apologize for the shoddy work of before. It was necessary to make the stitches loose, as the Crystal Ashen needed room to grow." he explained to her. "But now it is at optimum development. Tonight...yes, beautiful, tonight you will reign again." he said, excitement growing in his voice.

Quistis felt very afraid.

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"We must find her! Quickly!" Rinoa cried, running over to Squall. Startled, he dropped the papers he was holding onto the desk and stared at his girlfriend.

"What? Did you find out something?" he asked her. Rinoa nodded. He gazed at her expectantly. Her hair was messy, as she had only just woken up, and her clothes were creased.

"Squall....just...she's really hurt." Rinoa said, feeling horrible inside. Squall looked disturbed.

"I know. Selphie...she found out what they wanted her for. One of the technicians who used to work for Dr Odine told her about something called the Crystal Ashen. It can bring back Sorceress'." Squall said. Rinoa looked confused.

"So?" she said impatiently. He sighed.

"Dr Odine was the only one with the plans. They found his body yesterday, his lab was trashed. The plans for the Crystal Ashen was gone." he said. Rinoa gazed up at him, not understanding. He explained.

"The Crystal Ashen must be implanted in a person who physically resembles the Sorceress to be brought back. They must be someone who suffers severe emotions, anger, rage frustration. Eventually, the Crystal Ashen will grow, and will become one with the person. They will gradually become more and more like the Sorceress, gaining her powers, until they eventually become her completely. And the person they were before will be lost." he said. Rinoa looked scared.

"Quistis...I saw her. She had a huge scar on her stomach...." she said, a cry catching in her throat. Squall looked worried.

"Then we must hurry." he said, determination in his voice.  
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Quistis felt a strange burning sensation in her stomach. Her eyes flew open, and she moaned as the feeling of intense heat grew, spreading from her navel right up to her neck. She twisted, straining against her bonds, moaning in pain. The door opened, and she gasped, partly because she felt so strange, and partly because it was three of the dwarves. They scuttled over to her, and stroked her with their long fingers, muttering insidiously.

"Yess...your Excellency...we know...sssssoon." they hissed in excitement. Quistis felt a pain in her head, forcing her to close her eyes. The creatures's hissing seemed to reach a crescendo, and she felt a flower of agony blossoming in her skull. She let out a high pitched wail, and then fell silent. Lika touched Quistis forehead, pushing the girls head to one side. Lika smiled as she realized the girl was unconscious. Turning to the others, she threw back the hood of her cloak, and raised her hands above her head.

"The Sorceresss is awakening!" she cried.  
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"You've found it?! Whoo hoo!" cried Selphie, jumping up and down in excitement. She gazed at the screen in front of Squall, and he tensed, expecting another life-threatening hug from her. Luckily for him, she managed to restrain herself.

"Lets go get her!" Selphie yelled, putting her hands on Squall's shoulder's and yelling in his ear. He turned around in the swivel chair to face her, wincing.

"Selphie..do you have to scream right in my ear?" he said, but he too was happy they had finally found where Quistis was. She grabbed his hand.

"Come on! Lets tell the others!" she said, taking his hand and leading him out of the room.

Rinoa was sitting on a couch outside the room. She smiled as she saw Selphie's wide grin. "What is it? What have you found?" she asked. Selphie clasped her hands together.

"We've found the co-ordinates of the underground lab! That's where Quistis is held!" she said excitedly. Rinoa gasped.

"That's great! We must hurry." she said, looking concerned. Squall gave her a puzzled look. Rinoa hadn't given him details of what had happened to Quistis, but he knew it was bad. It had really upset Rinoa.

"We'll round up everyone, and attack the place tonight. We've got surveillance teams out there now, they're checking it out for us." he told them. Rinoa nodded, looking into the distance.

"I hope we get there in time." she murmured to herself. Squall heard her, and became more worried.

"Rinoa...please tell me. What happened to her?" he asked. Selphie, sensing this was private, moved away. Rinoa looked at him, staring intensely into his eyes.

"She was raped. By Seifer." Rinoa stated in a flat voice. Squall stared back at her, his eyes widening slightly, but he made no response. He turned away from Rinoa, and stared down the long corridor.

"Let's go. Now." he said in a harsh voice.

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"I'm going to kill him with my own hands." Squall said calmly. Rinoa looked at him in shock, but didn't say anything.

"He's done it this time. I won't hold back. This is..he's despicable." Squall seethed. Rinoa became a little worried.

"Squall, don't let it get to you so much. Concentrate on helping Quistis, and then we can help her get revenge." she said, trying to sooth him. He appeared to get more angry. The car they were in jolted over a rough piece of road. Rinoa looked around at her friends. Selphie was leaning against Irvine, asleep, and he was looking down at her, a slight smile on his face. Zell was standing at the end of the car, running through some training exercises. She and Squall had been talking, and she had revealed to him the full details of her dream. It had affected him more than she had thought it would. She too was very upset at the treatment of her friend, but Squall was furious.

"Why must he always try to hurt us? First taking you, destroying Trabia, and now this...this is the worst so far." he said angrily, pushing his fingers through his hair. Rinoa put a hand on his arm.

"Calm down Squall. Wait until we get there...then you can have it out with him" she said. She sighed. "I...I wish we had got there sooner too. But we're doing all we can to find her. Don't blame yourself Squall." she said. There was no reply.

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Fujin paced anxiously outside the room. She didn't know what was going on in there, but she knew tonight was the climax of everything. What Seifer had been waiting for. Forget the facade of Edea and Ultimecia, there were mere shadows in the view of Oriscala. Fujin Athen was scared, for the first time in her life. The amount of energy which hung in the air, radiating from that room. She was loathe to enter it, but she knew she should. To loosen Quistis' bonds, as Seifer had asked her to do. But, she felt a sense of trepidation, and she felt like running, far far away from that room.

Instead she put her hand on the door knob. She paused before twisting it, every instinct telling her to turn, to run before it was too late. But as usual, Fujin's rational mind, cool as ever, won over, and defiantly, she opened the door wide.

At first, there didn't seem to be much different. Quistis was asleep, in the position they had left her. It reminded Fujin of a crucifixion, the way her arms were bound above her shoulders on either side of her head. Her hands hung limp from the bonds on her wrists, and there was blood staining the rope. Fujin took a step towards her. Quistis didn't move. Reproaching herself for feeling such irrational fear, Fujin took out a tiny ornate flick-knife and set to work cutting away the rope which restrained Quistis. As she cut away with the silver blade, her hands slipped on the ivory and onyx inlaid handle, and Fujin realized she was sweating. Cursing, she attacked the ropes with more fervor, trying to combat the mounting sense of terror inside her. It was as if there was gothic music playing, and it was slowly reaching a horrifying crescendo, only she couldn't hear it.

As she cut the last of the rope, Fujin took a step back from the bed, and felt a weird shudder pass through the air. Quistis' body seemed to undulate as Fujin watched, and new life seemed to breath into her. She stretched her arms, flexing her fingers in a lazy, superior fashion. Her eyes opened, and Fujin's pouting mouth dropped open as she saw Quistis blue eyes slowly transform to the colour of snakes eyes, a deep yellow oxide.

Fujin took a few hurried steps back, and Quistis leant forward, a soft smile on her face. Fujin felt like whimpering, she was terrified, all rational thoughts went out of her head. Quistis slowly shook her head, letting her long blonde hair fall forward. Fujin noticed it was slowly curling into soft spirals, and growing longer before her eyes.

"Fujin Athen..." Quistis said. Her voice was much deeper than usual, and had a seductive quality to it. Fujin pressed her lips together, and clutched her Pinwheel tight to her chest. Quistis seemed to notice. She raised a hand, and the Pinwheel flew from Fujins hands, embedding itself in the other wall. Quistis laughed, a beautiful, silvery laugh. Fujin almost wept.

"Little Fujin...don't be afraid. I like you. You have a strong mind. You have nothing to fear from me." said Quistis in a soothing voice. Fujin dropped her hands to her sides, relaxing a little. Fujin bowed

respectfully.

"Your Excellency." she said in her clear voice. Quistis smiled regally. Fujin rose, shaking her jagged grey hair back from her face. Quistis began to remove her torn and bloodied top.

"Get me more suitable attire." she ordered, a hint of disgust in her voice as she examined Quistis' outfit. Fujin bowed again, and crossed to the cupboard in the room, where they had prepared a fine gown for the Sorceress. She brought it out, and held it for the Sorceress to see. Quistis smiled again.

"It will do. For now." she said.  
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The member's of the new Esthar Garden team waited anxiously for the arrival of Squall and the others. They were nervous, as these were undoubtedly the most respected people they had ever had the chance to meet. Especially Squall Leonhart. He was a legend in the Gardens, and it was almost every young SeeD's dream to be on a team led by Squall.

Eventually, the car bearing Squall and the others arrived. Immediately the other SeeD team went to meet them, silently saluting all of the new arrivals. Squall nodded to them, and they proceeded to a clearing which was obscured from the view of the entrance of the caves.

"Is there a way in?" asked Squall. The other SeeD looked nervous.

"We've discovered a back route in though the waste tube of the laboratory. It isn't exactly the most convenient way in, but you'll get there unseen. And it isn't heavily guarded like the rest." he said. Squall nodded.

"Well done." he said dryly. The SeeD smiled. A compliment from Squall, albeit one not spoken with much feeling, was very much appreciated. Squall turned to the rest of the waiting Esthar team.

"Please tell me what else you have seen. Have any of you seen the missing Instructor, or Seifer Almasy?" Squall asked. All of them shook their heads. Then one girl spoke up. She was very young, only about fifteen, although she looked younger.

"I...I saw someone matching Fujin Athen's appearance though." she said tentatively. Squall made no response. She continued.

"The woman...she was sitting outside for a little while. She appeared upset. Then she went in again," said the young SeeD. Squall nodded.

"Thankyou. At least now we know Seifer is there." he said. He almost spat the name, so great was the hatred he felt for his former

training companion. He turned away from the Esthar team, back to his comrades.

"We'll go in through the back. Through the waste system. Selphie, Zell, you should be used to this," he said, in an attempt to lighten the tension all of them were feeling. Selphie smiled at him weakly, and the others checked their weapons. Rinoa took a deep breath. Squall glanced at her, and did a double take.

"Rinoa...your eyes..." he said, startled. They had gone a deep shade of yellow. Rinoa gazed at him.

"I know. My powers, they are growing stronger, I can feel it. This is weird, Squall..." she said. He didn't have time to question her further.

"We must go now. Come on!" he said, leading them through to the back.

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Fujin stepped back from the Sorceress, bowing again. The Sorceress looked at herself in the mirror, a haughty expression on her face. She turned to Fujin.

"Athen. You have served me well. Look at me." she commanded. Fujin obediently looked into the Sorceress' eyes. She felt a strange light-headedness, and eventually the Sorceress broke their gaze, leaving Fujin feeling drained.

"You love Seifer. You are afraid that once he meets me, and pledges his life to me, you will be forgotten. All you care about is Seifer." she stated quietly. Fujin looked troubled.

"Yes...that's true..." she said uncertainly. Oriscala gazed at Fujin.

"Do not worry. He will not forget you. I'll make sure of it. You will become my handmaid, a task as important as Seifer's. You and he will be equals, and have the same amount of power. Is that what you want? You and he would spend your entire lives together...devoted to me." she said. Fujin felt a warm flush creeping over her.

"Yes...yes...that's what I want..." she said, feeling drugged. Oriscala smiled benevolently.

"As I said before. You have nothing to fear from me. You and Seifer, you will both be my closest. You will both be under my protection, and you in turn will protect me." she said in a seductive voice. Fujin felt elation. Her whole life with Seifer, devoted to a common cause, being with him, sharing the same responsibilities as him...it was more than she had ever dreamed of. Oriscala looked at Fujin expectantly.

"Well? Will you become my servant?" she asked. Fujin nodded.

"Of course." she replied. Oriscala smiled, revealing her sharp white teeth. Stepping away from the mirror, she shook her thick blonde curls and smiled at her reflection. She was beautiful, and although she looked incredibly like Quistis still, her whole manner was different. As before Quistis seemed to have an air of calm and serenity about her, the Sorceress had an air of hidden power, and exuded superiority and confidence. She also looked more child-like than Quistis, and had deceptively soft features. Her big topaz eyes were framed by high arched brows, and had sweeping thick dark eyelashes. Her pink lips formed a pouting mouth, and her nose was straight, and upturned at the end slightly.

Her spiraling blonde hair hung in perfect bouncy curls to the middle of her back, and her figure, like Quistis' was slim and tall. She wore a red velvet dress, covered in sumptuous embroidery in maroon, and had princess sleeves. It reached down to the floor, obscuring her legs and feet from view. It had a plunging neckline, and was quite revealing. She certainly fitted the picture of the seductive Sorceress from the stories about her.

Turning, Oriscala walked to the door. "It is time I met my Protector." she said with an evil smile. Fujin bowed, and followed. She had fallen under her spell.  
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"Squall..." Rinoa whispered as she followed him in the dank tunnel. He paused and turned round to look at her.

"What?" he asked, slightly out of breath. They had to walk stooped over, as the tunnel was quite small. She looked worried.

"Something's wrong. I can feel it. My powers, they are growing...I can tell what people are thinking..don't laugh, Squall." she said, trying to work out his expression in the gloom.

"I'm not." he said. "You can tell what people are thinking? Like...me?" he asked. She shook her head.

"No. You're too strong. I could tell what Selphie was thinking a minute ago. It was weird, as if she was speaking right out loud."

"Are you sure she wasn't?" he said dryly. She hit him lightly.

"This is serious Squall. No, she wasn't speaking. I heard her...she was worrying about something. Something she would never say out loud." Rinoa said awkwardly. Squall smiled, curious.

"What?" he asked her, glancing to where Selphie was sitting on a little ledge, waiting for them to continue moving.

"Nothing. The point is, I tried to contact Quistis. I couldn't. I

don't know whether it's because she is far away, or asleep or something, but it worries me. I have a horrible feeling something is wrong." she said, shivering. Squall sighed, looking down the dark tunnel.

"Let's go then." he said, and the others followed once more as they walked down the cramped, dark tunnel.  
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Seifer stood up straight as his mistress entered the room. Oriscala was followed by Fujin, who was gazing at her with a look of open adoration. Seifer was slightly surprised, Fujin had, up til now, had a sour attitude about her whenever he mentioned Oriscala. He smiled at the Sorceress, and made a sweeping bow to her.

"My Knight." she said with satisfaction. Seifer remained in a bent over position.

"Sorceress Oriscala. This is a great honour." he said. She laughed, the beautiful, tinkling laugh which had enchanted Fujin. Seifer rose, and smiled as he looked upon her. She was so beautiful, he thought. Prettier than Edea, prettier than Quistis had been. Oriscala obviously approved of him too.

"Seifer Almasy. My faithful Knight. What makes you think I want you?" she asked mockingly. Seifer glanced at Fujin, and saw her unmoved. He smiled confidently at the Sorceress.

"Your Excellency, I will pledge my life to you. I already have. I will be your Protector, your Knight, your Slayer. Please let me fulfil my dream." he said in a low voice. Oriscala looked pleased.

"Very well. You will accompany Fujin, my handmaid. She loves you deeply, Seifer Almasy. I do not think you realize this. But I can see it is of little importance to you." she said. Seifer looked a little confused at her words. Fujin, love? He frowned.

"Sorceress, I am only concerned with your happiness." he said. Fujin didn't flinch. Oriscala laughed.

"Good, good. What a wonderful pair you two will make. You must understand, Humans to me are disposable. But I must have a few loyal to me. Those, I will love, and keep close to me. You two have been chosen. But Seifer, in order to be of use to me, you must look out for each other as well. Some people will get it into their minds to try and overthrow me. How can we defeat them if we are not united. Love is as valuable a weapon as hate, and can be used against you. Remember that." she said gravely. Seifer understood.

"Of course, Sorceress Oriscala."  
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Squall finally saw the door that the Esthar SeeD's had told him about. He motioned to the others to be completely silent, and to be still. Slowly, he pushed the door open, ensuring he himself stayed in the shadows. He breathed a sigh of relief as he saw the room was empty. They filed into the room silently.

"We must be quiet. Get your weapons ready." he said in a low voice. He glanced at Rinoa, and was concerned to see how pale and drawn she looked. It was also disturbing to see her normally dark brown eyes a shade of dirty yellow. He looked away from his girlfriend, feeling a strange sense of revulsion when he looked at her. He immediately felt guilty, and put his hand on her back, leading her to the next door.

"Come on, let's go get her," he said with a forced smile. Rinoa didn't move. He turned to her, avoiding eye contact.

"What is it?" he asked slightly impatiently. She didn't reply, but her breathing quickened. He began to get concerned.

"Rinoa?" he said in a low voice. Selphie looked on curiously.

"Squall, is she okay..." Selphie began. Squall grabbed Rinoa's shoulders, shaking her gently.

"Rinoa, come on!" he said in an unsure voice. She slowly looked up at him.

"Squall...don't go," she whispered, her voice barely audible. He frowned at her.

"I'm not going to leave you." he reassured her, but he was confused. Rinoa shut her eyes, and he could see her eyelids fluttering. She drew in a quick, shallow breath, and suddenly went limp in his arms.

"Rinoa!" he cried, stumbling as he tried to catch her. Selphie gasped. Irvine knelt beside Squall, and checked Rinoa's pulse.

"Her pulse is racing. This isn't a faint." he said. Squall gazed into Rinoa's face anxiously. He felt his heart sink, as if he was plunging down an elevator.

"Rinoa, please, wake up," he whispered to her. Selphie watched him, a concerned expression on her face.

"Squall, we can't stay here. What if someone comes?" she said reluctantly. Squall looked up.

"We have no choice. If someone comes, we fight. We have to wait for Rinoa to come round." he said. Selphie turned away, not having the heart to remind him that this wasn't a faint, and she may be unconscious for days, like last time. Her fears were soon dispelled though.

"Squ...Squall..." Rinoa said, in a tiny voice. He touched her cheek gently, concern clearly etched on his features.

"What? Rinoa, talk to me," he said in a deep voice. She stared at him with her amber eyes.

"Danger...too much. Don't go!" her voice rose to a desperate cry towards the end of her sentence, and she struggled against Squall's arms, trying to free herself from his embrace. Her released, her looking hurt.

"Rinoa, tell me what you know," he said softly. She looked like a frightened child.

"The Sorceress...much more powerful than me..." she said, swaying from side to side. Selphie reached out to her, but Rinoa held out a hand, sending a flash of energy to repel her friend away from her. Selphie stumbled backwards into Zell, who was looking on in confusion.

"We must...go. Leave, now!" Rinoa moaned, pleading with them. Squall took a cautious step towards her.

"Rinoa...we have to get Quistis. That's why we're here," he reminded her gently. Rinoa looked at him, incredible sadness in her honey-coloured eyes.

"Squall...if you go...you'll fall. I'll lose you..." she said in a faraway voice. He frowned looking worried.

"Rinoa, you wont lose me. We have to go. There is no time for this! We have to rescue Quistis." he said. Rinoa stared at him, standing perfectly still. Then she raised her hands to her eyes, covering her face. The others watched as she fell to her knees, and Squall rushed forward to her. He tried to touch her, but he was repelled by the energy surrounding his girlfriend. Eventually, she stood.

"What..what happened?" she asked, looking around with frightened eyes. Her normal, dark brown eyes. Squall sighed in relief. He surprised Rinoa by drawing her into a tight embrace, pressing her to him.

"Squall, what's wrong?" she asked him. He drew away from her, and stared into her eyes.

"You..the sorceress in you came out. You became Angelwing." he told her. Rinoa looked thoughtful.

"Yes...I know. I was watching...It was as if I was controlling myself from a distance, the words which I said were new to me when I heard them. I don't remember much of what I said though. Was it bad?" she asked. Squall shook his head.

"No. Lets just go on." he said, turning away so she wouldn't see the dread in his eyes.

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Oriscala tensed as she sat in her throne. Seifer and Fujin sat either side of her in smaller, less ornate versions of the throne. Seifer on the right, Fujin on the left. Both had blank expressions on their faces as Oriscala gave instructions to her worshipers. Seifer looked at her, sensing a change.

"Mistress, is something wrong?" he asked her. She stared ahead, her luscious lips pressed together. Her childish-looking face held an expression of almost sulking.

"There is something here. Another Sorceress. A weak one, but still a threat. She senses me, and she is scared." Oriscala said, almost in a trance. Seifer unsheathed his gunblade.

"I can get rid of her." he stated. Oriscala smiled at him, charmingly, making her look even more resplendent. She gazed at him from under her sweeping eyelashes.

"Seifer...my love, do not trouble yourself. She has a purpose here, let her fulfil it. She is of no danger to me. You see, you never start out with fear. You begin with love. Make them love you, make yourself seem innocent, and charming, Then, once you have their trust and love, you use it for your own good. Seifer, you must think of things on a wider scale. Like Fujin. She see's what will be best for you, she doesn't trouble herself with minor things. You must become more like that." she said. Oriscala descended from her throne, her rich velvet and satin crimson dress shimmering around her. She stepped closer to Seifer. To him, she looked like a fairy princess.

"Seifer..." she murmured with a sweet smile. He felt helpless, caught in her all-knowing gaze, her slightly mocking smile. She placed a delicate finger on his chest, trailing it down to his navel. Then she turned away from him, smiling.

"You have so much to learn. But I'll enjoy teaching you. Teaching both of you." she said, looking at Fujin, and smiling comfortingly at her. Fujin smiled back.

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Squall was surprised, and slightly disturbed, to find the place seemingly abandoned. He glanced round at his comrades as they stood in front of the wide double doors. It was so different from the rest of the laboratory, ornate, with a sense of richness about it. They were all nervous about what may be waiting on the other side of it.

Rinoa stood directly behind him. She was nervous, like the others, but not afraid. With Squall by her side, she felt like she could handle anything. She watched him as he stared at the doors, and she felt a sudden rush of emotion for him. "Squall," she murmured. He turned to her. She gazed at him, suddenly unable to speak. He seemed to understand.

"It's okay. Just prepare yourself." he said warmly, with a smile. She smiled back weakly, and he pushed open the door.

Squall walked into the room, with Rinoa and Irvine directly behind him. He stared right at Oriscala. She smiled back sweetly at him. Standing, she raised her arms in a gracious welcome.

"SeeD." she said in a soft voice. Squall frowned, remembering Ultimecia's first words to them as they stood in her castle.  
...SeeD...SeeD...SeeD...SeeD...Kurse all SeeD's....

"Welcome to my birthplace," she said in a beautiful, melodious voice. Squall stared at her suspiciously.

"Where is Quistis." he asked in a cold voice. Oriscala looked innocent.

"Squall, don't you recognize me?" she said in a sad voice. Squall stared at her.

"You're telling me you're Quistis?" he said suspiciously. Behind him, he heard Rinoa's breath catch in her throat, but he didn't turn to her.

"You aren't Quistis." he said, but his voice held a hint of unease. Oriscala took a few dainty steps towards them, her amber eyes wide and innocent.

"Please Squall, help me. It is me, I'm Quistis," she whispered, close to them. Standing in the middle of the huge stone hall, her childlike features pleading, Oriscala looked pure and innocent. Squall began to have doubts. Oriscala sensed this, and moved closer to him.

"Help me, Squall, you must protect me from...him." she said, her eyes wide and frightened. Squall looked uncertain.

"Who? Seifer?" he asked in disbelief. She raised a perfect finger to her lips.

"Shh. Yes...Squall...you don't know what he's done to me...." she said, tears falling onto her satin dress. Squall's face contorted in anger.

"I know what he did." Squall said, drawing his sword. Rinoa was unable to keep silent any longer.

"Squall, no!" she shrieked. He turned to her, and his eyes widened as he saw her, her eyes a vibrant yellow, the pupils narrowed into oval slits. She swayed from side to side, her arms stretched out to him. He took a few hurried steps away from her, fighting the sudden urge he had to strike her down, to get rid of the monster which had been his girlfriend.

"Rinoa," he gasped. He was startled as Oriscala grabbed his arm.

"Squall, please, protect me! She's possessed! Squall, make her go away!" Oriscala pleaded with him. Squall stared at Rinoa, feeling in turmoil. Slowly, he stepped towards Rinoa, his sword raised, his muscles itching to bring the blade down on her neck. He turned to

Oriscala.

"No! Rinoa isn't evil." he said, but there was a questioning tone to his voice. She looked at him sadly, her beautiful eyes misted. She bit her full lower lip, staring at him from under her long lashes.

"Squall...you know what's right inside you. Didn't you feel revulsion to her? She isn't your Rinoa...she's possessed by the Sorceress. The one they tried to get to possess me!" she said.

Squall backed away from both of them. Selphie, Zell and Irvine looked on, unable to speak. They were shocked that Squall was looking at Rinoa in such a murderous way.

Squall looked at them for guidance, but they offered none. He dropped his head, staring at the polished wooden floor.

"Take her...away...go! Selphie, Irvine...take her!" he said, his voice rising towards the end. Selphie let out a little cry, and he raised his head. They could all see the conflict and hurt in his stare.

"Go! Take her with you! Before I.." he cried hoarsely, swiping at the air with his sword. Selphie grabbed Rinoa's arm as she swayed, and took the girl out of the room, casting a worried look behind at Squall. Irvine stared at Squall, before following Selphie. Zell looked as if he was about to say something, but shut his mouth at a warning glance from Squall.

The heavy wooden door shut with a booming sound, and Squall, feeling drained turned to Oriscala. She had a sympathetic smile on her face. Squall stared at her, hurt in his azure eyes.

"What's wrong with her?" he asked, wearily. Oriscala put a gentle hand on his face, stroking his cheek soothingly. Squall didn't pull away from the touch.

"Squall....I know you are confused...but you are doing the right thing. The only way you can protect her is if you help me. Poor Rinoa...she is possessed. She isn't thinking straight. You must stay with me, protect me. Become my Knight Squall." she said in a deep, seductive voice, moving closer to him. Squall shut his eyes, feeling light-headed.

"Yes. I will." he replied.  
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End of Part One! Part two should be up soon...this story is kinda writing itself (yay from tired authoress!) Hope you are enjoying it.

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Part Two ~ Under Her Control  
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## 2. Default Chapter Title

The Commander ~ Part Two ~ Under Her Control

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By Selphie Leonhart

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Part two of the sequel to FF8, in part one Squall left the others to protect Rinoa, and joined Sorceress Oriscala as her Knight.

Rated: 15 for bad language, violence, and adult subject matter.

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"I will be your Knight." he said with more confidence. Oriscala smiled at Squall. He looked at her coldly. She stepped away from him as he replaced the gunblade in it's sheath.

"My Knight. Good. Thankyou Squall. Now, you must do something for me." she said softly. Squall gazed at her. He was stunned by her beauty, and felt light-headed in her presence.

"Anything," he said with difficulty. She looked back to the thrones, her long blonde curls tumbling over her shoulders.

"Seifer. Get rid of him for me, Squall." she said in a heartbreakingly sad voice. Seifer, hearing this, stood up. His face was twisted in confusion.

"Of course." he said, giving Seifer a malevolent glance. Seifer stepped down from his throne, gesturing wildly with his gunblade.

"Mistress! What is going on! This is Squall Leonhart!" he said. The Sorceress's mouth curled into an ugly smile which only Seifer saw.

"And he is more suited to me than you are. Squall, get rid of him. I no longer need him." she said in a hissing voice. Seifer gasped, and ran towards the Sorceress.

"Your Excellency...but you said...everything about loyalty, love..." he said, heartbroken. The Sorceress gave a contemptuous laugh.

"Seifer. I told you, you have much to learn. This is your education." she said evilly. His expression turned from one of disbelief to rage. He turned to Squall, slashing through the air with his gunblade.

"You'll pay for this Leonhart!" he cried, lunging forward at Squall. Squall dodged the attack easily, ducking under the whistling blade. He drew his own, and used it to block the lightning fast attack Seifer shot at him. Oriscala watched the battle, a smug smile on her face. Slowly, she retreated to her throne, watching the pair duel.

Seifer let out a cry of rage as Squall slashed his arm, and blood

stained the polished wood floor. He aimed a fatal blow at Squall, which missed his neck by inches, but the tip of Seifer's blade bit into his shoulder, ripping through the leather coat and cotton shirt he was wearing. In pain, Squall performed Rough Divide, and Seifer was left reeling from the damaging attack, blood streaming down his face from the slashed open scar on his forehead. He stepped away, blocking one more of Squall's attacks.

"I'll go," he shouted at Squall, anger still evident in his voice as he backed down. Squall glared at him, fire in his eyes. He still hadn't forgotten what Seifer had done to Quistis. Seifer walked briskly out of the hall, slamming one of the huge double doors behind him. Squall turned to Oriscala, clutching his shoulder. She smiled graciously at him.

"Well done." she said sweetly. She looked to her left, to Fujin. The younger girl was pale, and looked slightly sick.

"Fujin?" Squall said in surprise. He was shocked that she hadn't defended Seifer. Oriscala smiled smugly.

"Fujin is my handmaid. She isn't Seifer's little toy any longer." Oriscala said loftily. Squall walked towards the two woman, his bloodied gunblade dragging along the highly polished floor. Oriscala looked at him almost lovingly.

"Squall, my knight, you are hurt. Let me help you." she said, standing and gliding over to him in a swirl of crimson velvet and satin. He stood still, staring at her rich beauty as she laid a hand on his shoulder. He felt a warmth spread through him, and a tingling in his shoulder where the cut was. She removed her hand, and gazed at him with her big amber eyes. He stared back, unable to tear his eyes away from her beautiful, child-like face. She smiled sweetly at him.

"You have served me well. Thankyou." she whispered in her soft voice. Squall made no response, instead gazing wistfully at the lips which uttered those words. Oriscala drew away from him slightly, and turned her back on him, her cascading curls swinging as she walked away. "We have work to do." she said in a bored voice. Fujin immediately stood and followed her. She glanced behind her at Squall, and he thought the girl looked very sad. He followed the pair without a word.

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Selphie tried to comfort Rinoa as she sobbed. It was difficult, Rinoa seemed to possess strength she had never had before, and was able to fling her friends across the room whenever they came too close to her. Instead, Selphie stood a few feet away, talking to her softly.

"Rinoa...please tell us why you are upset. Squall will come back, don't worry," she said desperately. It didn't work. Selphie looked helplessly at Zell and Irvine.

"Yeah...Rinoa, It's not like he's gonna leave us," said Irvine awkwardly. Rinoa made no response, but sobbed even louder. Irvine shrugged. Zell didn't even try to say anything, instead he stared at the double doors they had just came out of.

"Hey, guys, I think somethings going on in there...." he said anxiously. Selphie glanced at the door, and heard a cry of rage. Her emerald eyes widened.

"Oh my God," she murmured, running to the door. "Squall! Squall!" she cried, trying her hardest to open the door. Zell and Irvine rushed to her, both trying in vain to open the door. It wouldn't open, however hard they tried. Selphie looked around at the others with frightened eyes.

"Squall's in there, alone with the Sorceress and Seifer. We have to help him!" she cried. Irvine looked at her helplessly.

"I can't open the door. There's nothing we can do, Selph," he said to her. She sighed in frustration, and shook the doorhandle again. They could hear the clash of gunblades from the other room.

"Sounds like he's doing okay for himself," said Zell, trying to reassure Selphie. She made no response. Suddenly, there was another cry, followed by silence.

"That wasn't Squall," Selphie said quietly. They all stepped back from the door, and waited expectantly. Eventually the door opened wide, and Seifer stormed out, slamming the door behind him. Selphie confronted him.

"What the hell is going on Seifer?! Where is Quistis, and what's happened to Squall?" she demanded of him. He stared at her as if he had never seen her before. Then he turned away, and looked at Rinoa who was standing still, staring at him. Then, the others watched in shock as she walked over to him, and pulled him into a tight embrace.

"Rinoa!" cried Selphie. Rinoa didn't budge, Seifer, surprised, put his arms around her, and rubbed her back gently. She rested her head against his chest, without speaking. Seifer stared down at the beautiful girl in his arms, not really knowing what was going on.

"Rinoa! What are you doing?!" Selphie yelled again. The smaller girl was very stressed, which was rare for her, because she had a sense of everything suddenly being beyond her control. Rinoa actually responded this time. She drew away from Seifer and gazed at him.

"He's no longer with her. He's one of us now." she said in a dream-like manner. Seifer shook his head.

"I don't know what you are talking about Rinoa." he said. She smiled at him.

"Seifer. You know now, she is evil. Squall had fallen to her. You..." she trailed off, and shut her eyes. Seifer took a step towards her. "Rinoa?" he asked. She exhaled sharply, a shudder running through her body. Then she collapsed, for the second time that day. Selphie, Zell

and Irvine rushed to her side as Seifer knelt next to her.

"Rinoa, please wake up," he said, patting her cheeks lightly. There was no response.

"What a fool I was," whispered Seifer, mostly to himself. Selphie heard him.

"Wow, you've realised at last." she said sarcastically. He ignored her, and lifted Rinoa's fallen body.

"I wanted power, and glory, and I thought only an even more powerful Sorceress could give it to me. One who ruled with hatred. Because I thought that was stronger. But now I see, you can't depend on someone like that. I put all my hope into her, and she just used me to bring Squall here. God, I haven't even got Fujin anymore," He said sadly. Selphie felt a twinge of sympathy for him. She watched him as he tenderly carried Rinoa's body to another door. She walked up to him.

"Have you really changed Seifer? Can we depend on you? Or is this just another plot to destroy Garden, and for you to get everything?" she asked flatly. He gazed at her, searching her deep green eyes for a trace of understanding.

"Selphie, I know I've been wrong. I guess there's no way I can reassure you. But isn't it obvious? Squall is with her now. You need a leader, and Rinoa needs a knight. Oriscala told me she was a Sorceress, and she felt uneasy about her. Maybe Rinoa is a threat to Oriscala. In that case, she needs protection. I will be her Knight." he said, with a tight smile. Selphie didn't look happy, but nodded all the same.

"If it's alright with you guys," she said, turning to her two friends. They shrugged, and Zell looked at Seifer suspiciously.

"I don't want to trust him, Selph, but it doesn't look like we have a choice."  
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The Sorceress floated out of the room, leaving Squall and Fujin feeling empty. Squall shut his eyes, and tried to figure out what was going on. He was startled to feel a hand on his shoulder.

"Fujin?" he said softly. The girl nodded to him, gazing into his eyes with her own colourless one.

"Squall, what's happened to Seifer?" she asked sadly. Squall frowned. He was surprised Fujin hadn't left when Seifer had. He shrugged.

"I don't know." he replied. Fujin sighed.

"I want to be with him." she said softly. Squall looked at her, curious.

"Fujin, why do you devote yourself to him, when he doesn't appear to care for you at all?" he asked. He wasn't being nasty, or trying to upset her, he just wanted to know. She sighed again.

"I just....he's my leader. He needs me, even if he doesn't know it. I belong to him. I didn't chose it, it just happened." she said sadly. Squall felt sympathetic to her.

"Fujin, I'm sure he's alright. He always could take care of himself," Squall said with a hint of bitterness. He was remembering what Rinoa had told him about Quistis.

"Fujin, what happened to Quistis?" he asked her. Fujin looked at him strangely.

"She is Quistis. The Sorceress. Didn't you know?" she asked, surprised. Squall nodded.

"Yeah, I knew that. I just want to know all that happened to her before it. For certain." he said. Fujin looked uncomfortable.

"She...we took her from the classroom, and brought her here. She was kept tied to the bed in one of the rooms, and Dr Mitchell put the Crystal Ashen inside her stomach. That's what gives the Sorceress her powers. And what keeps Quistis alive. That's the downside of the Crystal. Dr Odine had thought that the Crystal would get rid of the previous person completely once the Sorceress took over, but it doesn't. It just stores them, inside the Crystal. Without that person still alive, the Sorceress would die. The Crystal Ashen only works if the woman it is in feels great anger, pain or frustration. It feeds off negative energy, and grows. Quistis...she felt all of those." Fujin told him emotionless. Squall nodded, restraining his own anger.

"Seifer. What did he do to her?" he asked in a controlled voice. Fujin looked at him calmly.

"You know what he did, don't you?" she said. Squall angrily hit his fist on the arm of the chair Fujin was sitting in. She didn't react.

"Damn him." he said with gritted teeth. She looked at him with a hint of sympathy.

"I can't say anything to make it better for you. So don't make me." she said flatly. He didn't look at her.

"I should have killed him when I had the chance." he muttered. Fujin sighed.

"You weren't meant to. If the Sorceress had wanted you to, she would have not let him escape. As it is, he is now with the other Sorceress. The one inside the body of your Rinoa." Fujin said coldly. Squall closed his eyes, remembering the terrible urge he had to kill Rinoa when he saw her. It made him feel so guilty and powerless.

"Does Rinoa know she is possessed?" he asked Fujin. The younger girl shrugged.

"I don't think so. Quistis doesn't." She replied in an uninterested voice.

"But she spoke to me...she begged me to protect her. Wasn't that Quistis?" he asked. Fujin nodded impatiently.

"Yes. From time to time, the Sorceress inside Quistis will fade for a while, and Quistis will come through. When she asked you to become her Knight, that was Quistis. She was asking you to protect her."

"From who?!" asked Squall. Fujin bit her lip.

"From Rinoa." she replied.  
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Rinoa woke up in Seifer's arms. For a minute, she thought he was Squall, and smiled to herself. Then she realised who he was, and jumped to her feet.

"What's going on?!" she cried. Selphie looked at her from across the other side of the car.

"You....became a Sorceress again, and blacked out. Really, Rinoa, do you choose the most inconvenient moments," she said with a smile. Rinoa wasn't amused. She whirled around to face Seifer.

"What happened? Where's Squall?!" she asked. Seifer looked at her incredulously.

"You don't remember? Squall decided to become Sorceress Oriscala's Knight. He left you guys for her and Fujin." said Seifer bitterly. Rinoa gasped, feeling a hollowness inside her.

"Why?" she breathed in a barely audible voice. Selphie, sensing her friends distress, stood to help her.

"Rinoa, come and sit down," she said gently, leading Rinoa to the seat next to her.

"Why did he leave us, Selphie?" she asked softly. Selphie shrugged.

"Quistis....she asked him to protect her." Selphie said. Rinoa bit her lower lip to stop it trembling.

"But he...he promised me...he would always be my Knight." she said, feeling her heart physically ache. Selphie felt awful.

"Rinoa, I don't know what is going on. But something wasn't right there. Whatever that was, it wasn't Quistis. And Squall wasn't acting like himself." she said. Rinoa looked at her angrily.

"Then why did all of you leave him there!" she cried. Selphie winced.

"We didn't have a choice. Squall made his decision. He fought Seifer, and we were locked out. We had to get you away from him." Selphie said reluctantly. Rinoa looked confused.

"Why?" she asked Selphie shut her eyes.

"Because he would have killed you."

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Fujin stepped over to the couch Oriscala laid on, her golden hair tumbling over her gently rising and falling chest as the Sorceress slept. Fujin sensed a change in her as she watched. Suddenly the Sorceress opened her eyes. They were a clear blue. Fujin breathed in sharply.

"Quistis?" she said quickly. Quistis looked around her with frightened eyes, gazing down at herself, pulling at her long curling hair questioningly.

"Fujin? What...what's happened to me?" she asked in a scared voice. Fujin looked at her coldly.

"You have been possessed by Oriscala. The only reason you are here is because the Sorceress is sleeping. Quistis, don't try and fight it. It is useless. There is no chance for you or your friends to win." Fujin said dryly. Quistis stared at her.

"Where are my friends?" she asked, horrible images going through her mind.

"They were here. To rescue you. They've left now." Fujin said smugly. Quistis felt tears of despair falling down her cheeks.

"They....they've gone?" she asked shakily. Fujin nodded.

"Except Squall." she said. Quistis' eyes lit up.

"Squall? He's still here?" she asked. Fujin smiled tightly.

"He's decided to become your Knight. Well, Sorceress Oriscala's Knight." Fujin said almost happily. Quistis opened her eyes wide in horror.

"He's under her control?!" she said. Fujin nodded, then a shadow passed over her face.

"He fought Seifer. He and Seifer...I guess they swapped places. He is now with your friends. Squall is with you. I suppose now they are enemies." She said thoughtfully. Fujin hadn't realised that before. She wondered whether she would end up having to fight Seifer. For some reason, the thought didn't inspire as much horror in her as it would have usually done. Quistis on the other hand, looked

devastated.

"This is it...without Squall...they have no hope," she murmured. Fujin felt uneasy.

"Just go back to sleep. Make this easy on yourself." she ordered. Trying to get rid of the chill which had suddenly come over her.

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Back in Esthar, Laguna was furious. And it was terrifying. Even Ellone was hiding in a corner, and the various servants were keeping out of his way. No-one had ever seen the President of Esthar angry before.

"You just went and left him there! What kind of friends are you!?! " he yelled at Irvine and Zell. Selphie and Rinoa both seemed close to tears when faced with Squall's shocked father.

"We...we didn't have a choice. He decided to stay with Quistis. We couldn't stop him." Irvine explained. Selphie stepped forward.

"There was something wrong with him. He was acting out of character. He almost killed Rinoa." she said to Laguna. He shook his head.

"I can't believe you just left him there..." he said, but there was no anger in his voice any longer. Rinoa pushed past Selphie.

"We have to get him back." she said softly. Everyone stared at her.

"We can't force him. And anyway, we have bigger problems to worry about," said Zell. Rinoa narrowed her eyes at him.

"Like what?!" she asked him. Zell swallowed.

"Like them." he said, pointing out of the window. Rinoa walked over to it, and gasped as she looked out. The streets of Esthar were crawling with thousands of monsters, some were flying around the palace, and there were no people in sight. The monsters were huge.

"What! When did this happen?" she asked. Laguna sighed.

"A few hours ago. While you were sleeping." he said. "The army is keeping them from invading the palace, but there seems to be an unlimited number of them." he said. Ellone stepped up to the window beside Rinoa.

"I know you are scared for him. I am too. But Squall can look after himself. I'm sure he'll be fine." she said with a little smile. Rinoa turned her face to Squall's adopted sister. The older girl looked sympathetic, and her brown eyes were filled with warmth.

"I hope so," she said quietly.  
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Oriscala stepped out of the caves, and into the sunshine. Squall and Fujin followed her. Both were dressed in the same asexual style of clothes, black trousers, black slash-neck pullovers. Because both of them had very striking features, it made them look gothic and in a way ethereal. Both had their weapons, Squall his silver gunblade, Fujin a new platinum pinwheel which was called First Light. They both walked behind Oriscala silently, walking next to each other. They followed her to a carriage, which was surrounded by seven or eight of the dwarves. Oriscala spoke to them.

"My servants. We are going to Esthar Palace. My army is already there, and it is your duty to escort us to the palace. You will not be harmed by the monsters, they know who we are." she said to them. One of them opened the door to the carriage, and the three tall figures got into it, led by Oriscala. Once inside, the door was shut, and the carriage set off. Oriscala smiled at Squall and Fujin.

"You know why we are going to Esthar, don't you?" she asked them, a slight edge to her voice. Both nodded silently. Oriscala smiled. "You, Squall, are to assassinate the President. You will do that for me, won't you? To protect me?" she asked him, clasping his warm hand in her cold one. Squall gazed into her amber eyes, expressionless.

"Of course." he replied.  
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Seifer called the others over to the window. "Hey, somethings happening out there," he said, pointing outside. The waves of monsters seemed to be diminishing, and something was coming towards them. Rinoa frowned.

"What is it?" she asked. Irvine stared at the black speck, which was becoming larger as it neared the Palace.

"Holy shit...it's the Sorceress," he said, backing away. Everyone looked at him.

"How can you tell? They're so far away!" said Selphie. He shook his head.

"I'm a sniper. My eyesight is better than yours. Anyway, look closely. There are three people in the carriage. A woman with long blonde hair. It has to be her. And I don't think they are here for a reconciliation." he said grimly. Rinoa bit her lip anxiously.

"I hope Squall is there." she said quietly. Selphie frowned.

"I hope he isn't. Because we'd have to fight him. You do realise that, don't you Rinoa?" she said gently. Rinoa spun round to face her angrily.

"We can't fight Squall! He's our leader!" she cried. Selphie shook her head.

"Look, Rinoa, I love Squall too. But...he's switched sides. It may not be his fault, but he is protecting the Sorceress. And she is evil. He may even be on his way to try and kill us." she said, swallowing hard. Rinoa turned back to the window, putting her hand on the glass as it began to rain.

"I will never fight him." she promised herself, watching the carriage draw nearer. Nervously, she clutched the necklace she was wearing, feeling the comforting coldness of the two rings she wore around her neck. It wouldn't be long now, before she found out whether or not she could save Squall.

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Squall stepped out of the carriage into the pouring rain. He wasn't wearing a belt or a sheath for his weapon, so he had to hold the silver blade constantly. He waited patiently for Fujin and Oriscala to descend from the carriage before walking behind her towards the Palace. He felt totally blank, and empty, the only thought he had was that he was protecting Quistis. Nothing else seemed important.

As they neared the Palace, Oriscala turned to him, and looked at him intensely. "Squall, you know what you have to do now." she prompted him. He stared at her, his sea- blue eyes piercing in their intensity.

"Yes. Kill the President." he replied. She smiled and nodded.

"Good. Fujin and I will be with you. But you will fight." she said to him. He nodded, and stepped in front of the Sorceress.

"I'll protect you Quistis. I'm your Knight." he said. She smiled evilly, her amber eyes glowing.

"Yes. You are." she said softly. He walked forward, into the Palace. The two women followed him. Eventually they got to the throne room. The rest of the Palace was empty. Squall pushed open the door.

He was faced with Seifer, his gunblade ready to attack. Immediately Squall levelled his own blade at Seifer's neck, waiting for instructions from his mistress. Oriscala stepped forward, a smug smile on her face.

"Seifer! My former Knight. I'm so sorry I had to replace you, but I found someone much more suitable." she said in a melodious voice. Seifer glared at her.

"Oriscala, you don't fool me anymore. You can't control me like that pathetic boy," he said with a glance at Squall. Oriscala's expression turned ugly.

"Let's see just how pathetic he really is." she whispered, her eyes taking on a reddish tint. Squall lunged forward at Seifer without warning, and there were gasps of surprise from the people watching. Selphie stepped forward, a look of horror on her face as Seifer stumbled from the deep slash on his chest. She cast Cure on him instinctively. Oriscala shot her a furious look, and raising one graceful arm, sent a sphere of energy out to Selphie, throwing her hard across the room. Selphie landed on the floor with a thud, and Irvine immediately rushed over to her. The others watched as Seifer attacked Squall, and once again the clash of gunblades rang in the air.

Rinoa watched the furious battle with tears streaking down her face. She felt like she was losing everything. It was all upside down. If Seifer won, Squall would be dead. If Squall won, he would kill them all. This was the end for her, however she looked at it. Even though Seifer said he was her Knight now, in her heart Squall was the only Knight she could ever have. He had never, ever told her he loved her, and she was glad of that. Because words never meant much. And love was a word used so often, and so rarely held it's true meaning. Selphie had used it a while ago, saying she loved Squall. But the love Selphie had for him was nothing like the depth, the aching emotion which Rinoa felt for him. And now, as she watched him, she knew he had fallen far beyond her reach.

Finally, Seifer slipped, and fell to one knee. Squall had a twisted smile on his face as he raised his sword to strike the finishing blow, but it never came. There was a shout, and it distracted him. Squall's blade fell, and bit deeply into, Seifer's shoulder, instead of his neck. Seifer screamed in pain, and fell unconscious to the ground, as Squall stood over the body of his enemy, breathless. He turned to where the shout had come from, and saw his sister standing, there.

"Squall...please..." she whispered to him in the shocked silence which followed the battle. Squall didn't appear to recognise her, there was nothing in his cold blue eyes. Ellone looked scared, and raised her voice.

"Squall, what are you doing? Serving her? She is evil Squall!" Ellone pleaded with him. Squall stared down at his dripping gunblade, and calmly reloaded it. Ellone watched him in mounting fear. Squall glanced at Oriscala. Her face was lit up with an unholy light, and her eyes appeared bigger. Fujin, who was standing behind her, stared down at Seifer's unmoving body emotionless. Squall turned to Laguna, who was watching Squall silently. Squall took a few steps towards him. Rinoa could hear her own heart thudding in her chest as the tension in the room rose dramatically. It was as if she had a premonition of what was going to happen next, but was powerless to stop it. She was rooted to the spot as Squall raised the dripping blade once more.

He aimed it at Laguna, who watched expressionless. Ellone's eyes were wide, her hands half raised to cover her mouth. She too, was unable to move. Maybe it was Oriscala's doing, or maybe everyone was too shocked to move. But no-one stirred as Squall's finger tightened on

the trigger.

He looked down the silver blade, to where the President of Esthar stood. Laguna's deep green eyes were fixed on Squall. There was no fear in them, or pleading. Only a look of acceptance, and maybe love.

Squall pulled the trigger.

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There was silence in the room. Laguna's clear green eyes opened wide as the bullet tore through his flesh with a crack, breaking through bone and tearing muscles. His mouth dropping open, he raised a hand to his chest as the blood dribbled out over his fingers. He looked up again, to Squall, he was looking at his father with a cold stare. Laguna looked confused, and then fell to his knees in shock. Then it set in.

"No!" screamed Ellone, running to Laguna's side. Rinoa moaned and began to cry, while the others watched Ellone in silence as she wept next to Laguna. Oriscala stepped forward, and laid a hand on Squall's shoulder. He turned to her, and she smiled seductively at him.

"Well done." she whispered. Squall looked uneasy.

"Quistis?" he said quietly. Oriscala looked at him. "Why was he going to hurt you?" Squall asked. Oriscala smiled.

"He wasn't. But he would have made others hurt me." she said softly to him. Squall nodded, and looked down. Laguna was lying lifeless on the floor, and Ellone had her arms flung around him, screaming out his name over and over. Squall could see he was dead.

"What do we do now?" he asked. Oriscala kissed his cheek.

"We take over." she whispered.

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"No."

Oriscala spun around to see Rinoa standing in front of her. Her cat-like eyes narrowed in hatred.

"You. The pathetic excuse for a Sorceress." she hissed. Rinoa gazed back calmly at Oriscala, whose child-like features were contorted into a mask of hate.

"I wouldn't try anything if I was you," she said angrily. Rinoa raised a hand and closed her yellow eyes.

"Curaga." she said softly. Seifer rose from where he had fallen due to Squall's attack. He rushed to Rinoa's side. Oriscala laughed bitterly.

"What a team. You, the weakest Sorceress I have ever encountered, and him, the boy who longs for power, but is too immature to handle it," she said condescendingly. Rinoa blinked slowly.

"You call me pathetic? You are in a stolen body, with a stolen Knight. You are the one who is pathetic." she said calmly, as if she was chanting. "I may be weaker than you, but my will is as strong. And I have something you don't." she said. Oriscala took a step forward, clutching onto Squall's arm. Rinoa didn't look at him, but continued to gaze into Oriscala's reptilian eyes.

"You? Power? What have you got which could possibly defeat me?" she asked, but there was a hint of uncertainty in her voice. Rinoa smiled.

"I never said it could defeat you. But, in a way, it is power. And it is something which cannot be stolen, or destroyed. You say that I am possessed. But it is you who is possessed. When I am Angelwing, it is merely another side of myself. Your sides aren't united. Quistis is good, and Oriscala is evil. You may have blinded Squall to seeing the evil in you, and fooled him into thinking that while I am Angelwing, I am evil, but he would never be able to hurt me." she said quietly, with a smile. Oriscala released Squall's arm, and pointed at Rinoa.

"Kill her Squall. Now!" she commanded, her voice harsh. Ellone, seeing this, ran in front of her brother.

"No! Squall, don't! Stop! Please!" she shrieked, tugging on his arm. Squall ignored his sister, and threw her across the room with one arm. She lay in a heap, her legs crumpled under her, crying violently. Squall continued to advance towards Rinoa. She looked at him calmly. Seifer picked up his gunblade from the floor. Rinoa raised her hand, and Seifer found himself pulled away from her. He tried to run back to Rinoa's side, but there seemed to be a shield around her and Squall.

Squall stared at her, and Rinoa could detect a flicker in his eyes. She almost smiled, but didn't, instead searching his dusky blue eyes further, coaxing him silently into remembering her. He gazed back into her honey coloured Sorceress' eyes. He raised his gunblade, holding it level with her neck, ready to slit her throat. But he didn't. Rinoa smiled at him as he shook his head.

"Rinoa?" he said, painfully. He dropped his sword, and it hit the floor with a clang as he clutched his head. Rinoa let her arms drop to her sides, and smiled as he looked up at her, staring. She felt a coolness wash over her as she returned to being human again, and ran to him.

"Squall, you're back." she said softly, throwing her arms around his neck. He pulled her tightly against him, burying his face in her shoulder.

"I'm so sorry," he whispered to her. She looked up at him, and put a

finger on his lips.

"It's alright. I understand," she whispered back, and smiled at him. He looked devastated.

"What have I done..?" he asked her, looking around the room. The smile left Rinoa's face.

"You didn't do anything. It was her." she said, looking at Oriscala, who was shaking in rage. The beautiful Sorceress raised her arms, and brought down thunder on Squall and Rinoa, four times stronger than a mortal could. It didn't touch them, as Rinoa had raised a protective barrier over the pair. Oriscala screamed in rage.

"I will kill all of you!" she screamed, and sent several Fire based spells flying around the room. Hurriedly, Rinoa cast Protect on all her friends, but as she was now mortal, the spell didn't have much effect against the sheer strength of Oriscala's spells. Squall stepped away from Rinoa. She reached out to him, but he turned away.

"Let me do this," he said to Rinoa, who watched as he stepped towards the Sorceress. Oriscala stopped spell-casting and gazed at him.

"Squall, I thought you were going to protect me," she said in an innocent voice. Squall shook his head.

"No! You aren't Quistis..." he said. Oriscala wept softly.

"But I am. Help me Squall...you don't know what they've done to me..." she said. Squall clutched his head, falling to his knees.

"Stop it! You aren't her! You are Oriscala!" he screamed at her. Oriscala towered over him.

"But then where is Quistis? Who is she? If I'm not Quistis, who is?" Oriscala said in a sad voice. Squall looked up at her. Rinoa tensed, she sensed a change coming over him.

"I don't know..." he said wearily. Rinoa stepped forward.

"Don't listen to her Squall!" she warned him. He clasped his hands together, his dark hair falling over his eyes. He looked as if he was praying to Oriscala. Suddenly he stood. Rinoa felt a cold sense of fear gripping her and Squall turned to her.

"You have no power over me." he said coldly. Rinoa's breathing got faster, and her eyes widened. Oriscala had a devilish smile on her face.

"She isn't a threat. Let's go Squall." she said softly. Squall turned to her, and stepped closer. Rinoa gasped, a sad sound of despair. Squall made no reaction.

Selphie, who was half lying in a corner, still injured from her fall, yelled at Squall.

"What are you doing Squall! You love Rinoa! Protect her!" she cried.

Oriscala turned angrily.

"Squall! Show them exactly how you feel about Sorceress Angelwing," she said maliciously. Squall, to everyones horror, turned to Rinoa, the gunblade raised once more.

"I hate her. She's evil. She's possessed!" he said in a cracked voice. This time, Rinoa didn't stand still watching, she grabbed her own weapon and held it ready to attack him.

"Squall, don't! I'll fight you!" she cried, her words choking her as she remembered the promise she had made earlier. Squall made no reaction. Oriscala smiled, satisfied.

"Stop, Squall. Leave her. She isn't worth it. Let's go." she said with a smug smile. Rinoa looked at Squall, her eyes misted with confusion and hurt. He turned away from her, and followed Oriscala as she drifted out of the room, her long hair swinging behind her.

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Seifer turned to the others once the three had left the room. "We have to get help. We don't have enough information to handle this by ourselves." he said in a low voice. He gazed around the room. Zell was talking to Rinoa quietly, trying to comfort her. Selphie was kneeling on the floor with Irvine, who had an arm around her. She was shaking her head, a hand over her eyes. Seifer guessed she was probably concussed. Ellone was sobbing in the corner, huddled over Laguna's body. Seifer raised his voice.

"We have to get help. Lets go back to Garden." He said. Rinoa looked up at him, and nodded. Selphie also got to her feet, and walked shakily over to him.

"We...we can't trust Squall anymore. We have to do this without him. Are you going to be our leader Seifer?" she asked him. He looked back at her. He could tell that if he said no, the small girl would take that responsibility on herself.

"Yes. I will be." he said. Selphie nodded gravely. "I think we should talk to Edea. She knows more about Sorceress' then any of us." he said. Rinoa stepped over to him.

"Yes. I need to talk to her also. I have to find out...why Squall feels such horror towards me when I am a Sorceress." she said, her voice trembling. Seifer looked at her sympathetically.

"I'm sure it's mind control. He can't really feel like that." Seifer reassured her. She nodded, sighing. Zell gazed at Seifer.

"What about Quistis? She seems to have vanished inside that....monster. Will we ever get her back?" he asked suspiciously. Seifer looked back coldly.

"I don't know. I wasn't thinking straight then. I was angry at her,

and I wanted power. Do you have any idea how humiliating it was for me to go back to Garden after Ultimecia? And with Raijin dead, my only friend was Fujin, and Squall made sure we were separated as much as possible. I made a mistake, I admit it. I was wrong. But I'm trying to set things right!" he said bitterly. Zell shrugged. Seifer turned away, hating himself for what he had done.

"Let's just go. We have to hurry, before that witch does anything more." he said. Selphie put a hand on his arm.

"What about her?" she asked quietly. Seifer turned, and looked at Ellone. "She's Squall's sister." Selphie explained. Seifer looked shocked.

"Squall murdered his own father?" he asked incredulously. Selphie gave him a meaningful look, and Seifer lowered his voice.

"The mind control must have been massively powerful. But he didn't kill Rinoa when ordered...I don't understand." he said. Ellone stood up.

"Are you going to kill Squall?" she asked flatly. Selphie shook her head vehemently.

"No! We'd never hurt him!" she said. Ellone nodded. She looked very pale.

"I still love him. But he is sick. You must help him. Please, don't hurt him." she said softly, looking down at Laguna. Rinoa stepped forward.

"I wouldn't let anyone harm him." she said. Ellone smiled weakly at her.

"I know. Take care, all of you." she said, turning away. Seifer walked towards her.

"You can come with us if you want." he offered. Ellone shook her head.

"I'd only get in your way. I can't fight. And....I want to stay here. Someone needs to sort out this mess. Now the monsters are gone...I need to reassure the citizens. And tell them the President is dead." she said sadly. Rinoa bit her lip.

"Will you take over his responsibilities? You and Squall are his next of kin...and I've never heard of the vice-President."

"That was me," she said with a smile. Seifer nodded, and bowed to her respectfully.

"Ellone, we have to leave now. Good luck, and I'm sorry for your loss," he said sincerely. The others nodded and offered their condolences. Rinoa was the last to leave the room. Ellone looked at her, and understanding passed between the two.

"He loved you more than Laguna. I'm just sad...that they never had the chance to talk. There was so much that needed to be said," Ellone said sadly. Rinoa nodded.

"Squall...he finds it so hard to talk. You must tell him, when you get the chance. He'll listen to you." Rinoa said. Ellone smiled, and took Rinoa's hand.

"Take care." she repeated. Rinoa gazed into her warm brown eyes.

"I will," she murmured, knowing exactly what Ellone was implying.

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"So we need your advice," Seifer finished, looking at Edea. Rinoa noticed a strange tension between the two, which was not surprising, as once she had him completely under her control. Edea nodded slowly, her waist-length hair slipping over her shoulders like a heavy curtain.

"Of course I'll help you. Seifer, I'm very proud of you, that you've managed to over-come your longing for power finally. Well done," she said warmly. Seifer almost blushed.

"Thankyou, Matron," he said quietly. The former Sorceress turned to the only person there she hadn't cared for as a child. Rinoa.

"Sorceress Rinoa, I know you have a lot of questions. Would you prefer to talk to me alone?" she asked softly. Rinoa glanced round at the others.

"Okay..." she said uncertainly. She and Edea walked out onto the beach. Rinoa smiled as she thought of Squall playing there as a child. Before Ellone left him. Edea sighed.

"You really care for him, don't you?" she said. Rinoa kicked at a pebble in the white sand.

"Yes. I do." she said. It was like a confession. Edea smiled to herself.

"Do you love him?" she asked. Rinoa paused. Edea glanced at her.

"I...I don't like to use that word. It seems like such a meaningless word to describe how I feel. But, I guess I do love him. More than I love anyone," she said quietly. Edea nodded.

"That's what power you have. Oriscala, she doesn't have love. She views it as a weapon, something weak people believe in. But it stopped Squall from killing you, and momentarily broke her spell." She said. Rinoa looked depressed.

"Why does he hate me so much when I am a Sorceress?" she asked glumly. Edea frowned.

"You never used your powers before now, did you?" she asked. Rinoa shook her head.

"Only in battle, when I was near death. And then it was only a few times." she said. Edea smiled.

"That's it. All mortals feel fear towards Sorceress'. It's natural. Squall isn't used to the change which comes over you. You must understand, when you become a Sorceress, you are revealing the wisdom and power of thousands of women before you, you become thousand of different people all at the same time."

"So it is a kind of possession?" Rinoa asked, confused.

"In a way, yes. But some Sorceress' refuse to share the power. They don't want the wisdom, but want all the power to themselves. That...that's when a Sorceress becomes unbalanced. Squall can sense all these different people in you..and it scares him. He doesn't know it though. His duty is to protect you, and it confused him when you changed. Oriscala's mind control exacerbated the problem, and made him want to kill you. I know you were hurt when he agreed to become her Knight, but you must understand, he thought he was protecting you from himself." Edea explained. Rinoa felt a lump in her throat.

"I never guessed." she murmured. Edea continued.

"Oriscala...she was a different kind of Sorceress. I studied her when I was younger, and I found out a lot about her life. She was an orphan, her mother had been a powerful good Sorceress, but had been murdered by an angry, ignorant mob of villagers who claimed she was responsible for an epidemic in the village. They killed the Sorceress, and tried to murder Oriscala, but she hid. Before she died, her mother passed on her powers to Oriscala. The young Sorceress, only around ten or eleven years old, grew up bitter after her mothers death, an outcast because of her powers, and unloved because she was constantly in hiding. She grew into a beautiful teenager, and learned how to use her seductive powers to her own advantage. She went back to the village of her birthplace, and made the son of the town mayor fall in love with her. She murdered him horribly, and left him crucified in the town square in the middle of the night. After making sure all saw it, she burnt the village to the ground, and stood among the flames laughing as they ran, dying, screaming around her."

"How awful," Rinoa said, her eyes wide. Edea nodded and continued.

"This started off her reign of terror. The few villagers which remained worshipped her in fear, and with their help, she conquered the neighbouring villages, killing all those not of use to her. She was fuelled by her hatred of the people who murdered her mother, and her own hot anger at the people who had shunned her and labelled her an outcast because of her powers. The teenage Oriscala eventually made her way to Esthar. She was the one who fortified it, and made it a super city. She made it into a hell, holding regular sacrifices of young women in her mothers name, to remind people of the pain she herself had felt when her own mother was taken from her."

"That's horrible...how did she get away with it?" Rinoa asked Edea, hardly believing what was being said. Edea looked sad.

"There was no-one to stop her. Obviously, Garden wasn't around, and

there was no army back then. Esthar was the most powerful country, and that was under her control. Oriscala also was an extremely powerful Sorceress, unlike any they had seen before in their villages. Before her, Sorceress' were the doctors, the wise women of the town. They had power, but not such immense strength as Oriscala.

She had the power of tainted Sorceress' in her. This was partly what made her so bad. You, Rinoa, are lucky in that most of the power in you comes from good sorceress'. In Oriscala, almost all of the power was bad. Her own mother had been immensely powerful and good, but her own power came from a witch, and some even came from a disciple of one of the most evil Sorceress' of all time. She really had no chance to be good." Edea explained. Rinoa looked helpless.

"Then what chance have I got? I can't control my power, I...can't control Squall, what can I do? This is hopeless," she said in despair. Edea smiled.

"There is always hope. You must learn to control your power. I can teach you that. And after that, the rest is easy. I suggest you stay here for a while, with your friends, to discuss what to do next. You all need some time to sort things out in your minds. And, Rinoa, I'm sensing some tension between you and Seifer. What's going on?" she asked knowingly. Rinoa looked Edea straight in the eye.

"I dreamt of Quistis, before she became a Sorceress. I could communicate with her, and she told me what was done to her. Seifer...he raped her." Rinoa said with a sigh. Edea frowned, looking troubled.

"I would never have thought him to...but he must regret it now if he is helping you." she said, sounding uneasy. Rinoa shook her head.

"I don't know. He doesn't know that I know, and I haven't told the others. I hate him for what he's done, but I can't bring myself to be angry at him, because he is trying his hardest to protect us." she said, confused. Edea nodded.

"Yes, I can see that. Squall...did he know?" asked Edea. Rinoa nodded, looking frightened.

"He got really mad. I've never seen him like that before. He really wanted to kill Seifer." she said. Edea frowned again.

"That's strange...I know he'd have been angry, but Squall isn't the vengeful type. Something more sinister was going on, I'm sure," she said. Rinoa nodded.

"Yeah, I guess. I..I was so angry at Seifer. I hated him. I'm not sure whether I still do. I haven't really had time to sort out how I feel, what with the Sorceress, and Squall and everything...I haven't even begun to think of how we can get Quistis back," she said in despair. Edea turned to her, watching Rinoa as she gazed out into the breaking waves. Her black hair whipped around her face, and she looked like the frightened teenager she was trying so hard not to be. Edea felt sorry for her.

"Rinoa...I don't know you as well as the rest of my children, you are

the only one which didn't grow up with me. But I do know Quistis and Squall. Both of them are strong, and good. Even Seifer...he is good really. And there is always a way out. We can get Quistis back, and Squall. Just concentrate on yourself for now, or everything will be in vain." she said. Rinoa sighed.

"Alright. Tell me what I have to do," she said. They walked on as Edea began to teach Rinoa all about being a Sorceress.  
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Seifer watched the two from the window of the Orphanage, gazing at the two women as they walked along the shore. He sighed, and shut his eyes, remembering guiltily that this was all his fault. Seifer felt a horrible twisted feeling inside, and wished he could turn back time, and stop all this.

He missed Fujin. She was the one who always supported him, cheered him on, cared for him. He had used her, taken advantage of her. "Damn!" Seifer exclaimed, kicking at the crumbling wall, furious at himself. He remembered the look on her face when he had come out of Quistis' room...

\*Why did I do it?! Why am I so stupid. I hurt everyone...I am despicable for what I did to Quistis...and Fujin.\* He thought to himself. Resting his elbows on the stone window ledge, he covered his face with his hands. \*Why did I do that to Quistis? To prove that she was powerless? To show her that I was better than her? Or am I just sick?\* he thought bitterly. Seifer felt angry tears come to his eyes, and he swiped at them, feeling a lump in his throat.

\*I am sick...Squall should have shot me, not Laguna,\* he thought, gazing at the two women walked away from him. He heard footsteps behind him. Turning, he saw Selphie watching him with wide eyes.

"Seifer? Are you ok?" she asked. Seifer almost wept at the innocence in her voice. She was so open and carefree, he wished he could be like her, with a clear conscience, and free of sin.

"Fine," he said hoarsely, the lump in his throat choking him. Selphie smiled, her eyes dancing captivatively.

"I know better than that. You are our leader now. At least until Squall gets back. It's my job to take an interest in your angst." she said playfully. Seifer wasn't in the mood for lightheartedness now.

"Selphie, just go." he said quietly. Selphie gazed at him, her sea-green eyes full of compassion.

"Seifer, I know you feel awful about what happened. But you too were under the Sorceress' control. It wasn't all your fault." she said gently. Seifer rounded on her angrily.

"You know shit, Selphie! You've got no idea what went on in the lab!"

he yelled at her. Selphie looked unperturbed.

"Seifer, calm down. Tell me. Maybe I can help." she suggested. He looked at her coldly, and for a moment looked like Squall. Then he laughed bitterly.

"Why? Would it make me a better leader? Did you hold regular counselling sessions with Squall? Did he reveal his deepest darkest secrets to you?" Seifer asked her mockingly. Selphie frowned.

"Of course not. But you obviously do have secrets. And it might help if you share them." she offered. Seifer sighed.

"You don't want to know Selphie. And I don't want to talk about it. So, please, just leave me alone." he said. Selphie shrugged, and turned around, her coppery hair bouncing as she ran up the stone steps back to the others.

Seifer turned back to the window. Edea and Rinoa were out of sight. He wondered if he was doing the right thing by taking over as Rinoa's Knight. He knew deep down she needed protection, but why he didn't know. It was just instinct. He wondered if he would end up protecting her against Squall. Or what would happen if Squall killed him. Would Squall really kill Rinoa?

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That night, Edea and Rinoa stayed on the beach, training. Selphie and Irvine were asleep in the newly renovated bedroom, and Seifer and Zell were sitting with Cid in front of the fire, watching the two women as they worked. Seifer looked on in awe as Rinoa crafted a massive white stallion out of a wave, before sending it crashing into the rocks nearby. Rinoa's powers as a Sorceress had been no where near as powerful as Oriscala's, or filled with as much flair as Edea's in her time, but she was slowly getting to fulfil both criteria. Her spells became both powerful and elaborately beautiful as the three men watched her cast Ultima out into the dark sea, illuminating the coast with a deep green and white light, which spread further than any Ultima spell a mortal could cast.

Seifer also noticed a change come over Rinoa physically when she became a Sorceress. Her hair became longer, and there seemed to be a restless breeze about her. Apart from the obvious change in eye colour and shape (her pupils narrowed to slits) her face became fuller, her lips more pouting and her eyelashes longer. Becoming a Sorceress seemed to accentuate her best features. Thoughts of Quistis came unbidden into his head, and he shook them away angrily. He couldn't afford to dwell on his sins, otherwise they would take him over.

Slowly, Rinoa and Edea began to walk back towards the fire burning on the beach. Rinoa looked flushed. Seifer notice that she was mortal again. Edea sat down next to Cid, and Rinoa sat close to Zell, ensuring there was plenty of space between her and Seifer. Seifer wasn't offended, he knew she didn't like him.

"She's doing very well," said Edea with a smile. Rinoa nodded as Zell put his arm around her to protect her from the cold. She leant against his shoulder with a smile.

"I can control when I become a Sorceress now," she said, her teeth chattering in the cold. The warmth from the fire was wonderful, but there was an arctic breeze which whipped around the group. She clung closer to Zell for warmth, and he looked down at her, amused.

"Rinoa, are you coming on to me?" he asked jokingly. Rinoa slapped him playfully.

"Yes, Zell, I've had a crush on you for ages. Didn't you realise?" she said sarcastically. He grinned.

"Well, guess I'd better tell Celesa it's off then," he said, referring to his librarian girlfriend. Rinoa smiled, and yawned.

"I'm exhausted. I'm gonna go in now. See you in the morning," she said, bowing to Cid and Edea as she left. Zell followed her.

Seifer glanced up at Cid and Edea, feeling uncomfortable in the presence of the two adults. Edea smiled at him.

"Seifer, what's on your mind?" she asked him. Her light brown eyes glowed in the firelight.

"Nothing. I'm going to bed," said Seifer, preparing to rise. Edea stopped him.

"Wait." she said. He sat back down. She gazed at him sadly.

"Seifer, I know you well. What is it you are too afraid to tell the others?" she asked him. He stared back at her.

"Matron, there is nothing..."

"Seifer! I've cared for you since you were two months old. I've watched you grow from a baby into a teenager, and I know when you are troubled. Don't lie to me Seifer. You know I of all people won't judge you." she said. Cid stood, and with a glance at Edea, left the two. She smiled gratefully at him. Seifer sighed.

"Alright. This is all my fault. I wanted revenge on Quistis for embarrassing me, and I was mad at Garden for separating me and Fujin, and putting me in a lower class. I should have been grateful they even took me back, but I resented it. Fujin told me about this resistance group in the East, against President Laguna. I thought it would be the perfect opportunity to get back at Squall if I helped overthrow his father. So I tried. And it looks like it worked." he said bitterly. Edea looked at him intensely.

"That isn't all, is it? There is something else, something eating away at you inside." she said sadly. Seifer looked up at her, and Edea noticed with a shock there were tears in his eyes.

"I'm a terrible person," he whispered. Edea wanted to reach out to

him, but she held back. Seifer continued, not attempting to hide his tears. He didn't feel he had to with Edea.

"I...I did something despicable..to Quistis...don't make me say it," he pleaded with her. Edea shut her eyes and nodded.

"I know what you did. I didn't believe it when Rinoa told me, but now I know it's true." she said in an even voice. Seifer wiped away his tears angrily.

"I'm so sorry." he whispered. Edea gazed at him.

"You shouldn't say that to me. Say it to Rinoa, to Selphie, to Quistis' friends. But I warn you Seifer, they may not be as understanding as me. Even I am having a hard time with it." she said with an edge to her voice. Seifer felt utterly broken.

"Will I be able to get Quistis back?" he asked her tentatively. Edea smiled at him, a warm, genuine smile which made him feel loved.

"No. You wont. But her friends will. Your job is to guide them. You might fool yourself into believing you are Rinoa's Knight, but you aren't really. Seifer, I know it is your dream, but you will never be a Knight. Don't take it badly, it just wasn't meant to be." she said, placing a hand on his arm. Seifer looked up at her, dry eyed.

"What about Squall?" he asked. Edea smiled wistfully.

"He never dreamt of becoming a Knight, but as it turns out, that was his destiny. Don't worry, he will come through this. Who knows, maybe you two will finally be able to resolve your differences?" she said with a soft laugh. She stood up, offering a helping hand to Seifer. He looked at her, and was reminded of several occasions when he was small and she would do the same. Smiling, he took the offered hand. Edea giggled, obviously remembering too when she used to be his mother.

"Come on. Lets go inside," she said, a warm light in her eyes. Seifer grinned.

"Yes, Matron." he said, accompanying her into the warm.

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Squall collapsed onto the silken couch, exhausted. Oriscala paced by the window angrily, oblivious to the exhaustion and discomfort of her two companions. Fujin sat next to Squall, resting her head on her arms, her eyes shut. They had walked miles after the chocobo's pulling the carriage up into the mountains had collapsed of the cold, and the carriage itself began to break up due to the roughness of the path. High on the mountains, unscaleable for ordinary mortals, laid Oriscala's Castle. It wasn't as gothic looking as Ultimecia's, instead had the feeling of a sumptuous county manor, with rich furnishings and heavy, shiny tables and chairs. Tall oriental vases were littered about, and the whole place was trimmed in crimson.

Oriscala fitted right in, but her two servants looked like gaunt spirits, shadows compared to her radiance.

"Damn her," whispered Oriscala to herself, staring outside into the snow-covered garden. She looked over to the couch, her face twisted into an ugly expression as she saw that both Squall and Fujin were fast asleep, Fujin leaning her head on Squall's shoulder.

"Get up!" she cried, sending a bolt of energy over to shock them. The pair sprang apart, looking at her with wide eyes. She stared back at Squall.

"Who is she! Who is this other Sorceress who enchanted you so!?" she demanded of him. Squall looked confused.

"Rinoa.." he said with difficulty. Trying to remember her name was hard, and he couldn't get an image of her head, however hard he tried. Oriscala frowned.

"Is she powerful? How long have you been her Knight?" she asked, pressing bloodless lips together. Squall shook his head.

"I...don't know. She...she can't be important," he said, the sentence sounding almost like a question. Oriscala smiled, appearing satisfied.

"No. She isn't important. You two may go, find yourselves a room." she said, waving a hand in dismissal. Squall and Fujin rose, both walking down the corridor silently, as if in a trance. Oriscala trailed a delicate hand down the cold window pane, tracing the lead pattern with her long fingernails. Suddenly she shuddered, and her eyes squeezed shut as if she was in pain. When she opened them again, they were a crystalline blue.

Quistis gasped, and then realised where she was. She had gotten stronger, and with great effort, had managed to overcome Oriscala's control. Gathering up the velvet skirts, she turned from the window and ran down the corridor after Squall and Fujin, who she could see turning a corner. Quistis, unused to this strange body, stumbled and fell, clutching her head.

"No!" she shrieked, feeling a warmth creep over her as Oriscala struggled inside her. Quistis won the battle, and got to her feet, her eyes still blue, her body still her own.

"Squall! Wait!" she cried, holding the long thick skirts up as she ran to stop herself falling over them. Her long spiralling hair flowed out behind her as she ran towards him, all the time struggling to stay in control. Finally she caught up with him. Squall turned to her, and Quistis saw weariness in his eyes. Fujin continued walking, but glanced behind her. Quistis decided it was best not to let Fujin know she was out of the possession of Oriscala.

"Come with me," she said in her most imperial tone. Reluctantly, but obedient, Squall followed her as she turned the corner, away from Fujin. There she stood close to Squall, staring into his eyes.

"Squall, it's me!" she whispered to him. He didn't react. Quistis choked back a sob. It was the first time she had seen one of her

friends since she had been captured.

"Squall, don't you remember me? I'm Quistis!" she said desperately. Squall looked confused.

"I know," he said. Quistis grabbed his arm.

"Squall! I've been possessed! You have to help me, you're under her control, Squall! She whispered furiously, tears streaking down her face. This was useless.

"Quistis, I'm tired," he said, exhausted. She took his face in her hands, forcing him to look into her eyes.

"Squall! I'm desperate! Please, remember! Remember me, remember Garden, remember what happened. I am not the Sorceress! Look at my eyes!" she cried to him. He stared at her, and Quistis thought she saw something change in his stare.

"Quistis..." he murmured, and shook his head, as if trying to clear it. Quistis gazed at him, dropping her hands from his face to his shoulders.

"Remember me...remember the day we were at the orphanage, when we found out we grew up together...remember when you became the Commander and we danced at the ball, please, Squall, how can the Sorceress be me? She possesses me, and I can't stop it. You've got to find a way to stop this..." she pleaded with him. He stared at her blankly.

"I...I don't remember what you are talking about. Quistis...I am your Knight. Nothing else matters," he said, but the words sounded painful, as if they were something he didn't want to say. She shut her eyes, and leant her head against his chest, slipping her arms around his neck and holding him close to her. Tentatively, he wrapped his own arms around her. He felt her tears soaking through the thin material of the black pullover he was wearing.

"Then there is no hope," she whispered, her words an echo of what she had said to Fujin only the day before. She pressed herself against him, crying into his shoulder, her head pressed against his neck. He looked confused.

"I don't understand," he said softly. Quistis made no reply, but held him tighter, as if she was afraid to let go. He felt her shuddering from the sobs wracking her body. Eventually, she stopped crying, and pulled away from him. He looked at her tear-streaked face with concern, confusion and tiredness on his face. She smiled at him, and he was even more confused. He searched her eyes for answers.

Her amber coloured eyes.

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Selphie woke up feeling refreshed that morning. She sat on the white sand of the beach, listening to the cry of the sea gulls and the

crash of the waves as the fresh breeze whipped around her face. She ate her breakfast out there while watching Edea and Rinoa go over some exercises. It was like watching a firework display, most of the moves the former Sorceress and her pupil did were fantastic. Selphie gasped in delight as Rinoa sent a hail of pebbles skipping over the ocean all at the same time. Then Rinoa clasped her hands together, and a huge snake rose out of the water in front of their eyes. Edea called out something to Rinoa, and the girl stood perfectly still as the black water snake lunged at her. Rinoa raised a hand, and the snake fell to the ground, stunned. Then it rose, and twined itself around Rinoa, who stood perfectly still.

Selphie, meanwhile, had grabbed her nunchaku and was preparing to run towards her friend and former matron, when Rinoa started to stroke the snake, and sang to it quietly. Edea clapped her hands in approval, and with a gesture from Rinoa, the snake began to go back to the ocean slowly. Selphie ran up to Rinoa, her eyes wide with disbelief.

"How did you do that?!" she asked incredulously. Rinoa smiled.

"Magic," she replied. Selphie nodded.

"I can see that. I had no idea Sorceress' could do that! You can control animals? Monsters?" she asked. Edea nodded.

"You noticed Sorceress Oriscala controlled the monsters in Esthar? I'm teaching Rinoa how to do that. It may come in useful." Edea replied in her soft voice. Selphie nodded, noticing how Edea always referred to Oriscala as 'Sorceress' out of respect. She wondered why, as Oriscala was certainly evil.

"We're nearly through. You're a fast learner, Rinoa," said Edea with a smile. Selphie clapped her hands.

"Yay! Then we can go and rescue Squall! And kick the Sorceress' ass! And rescue Quistis!" yelled Selphie, jumping up and down in delight. Rinoa laughed at her exuberant friend.

"Calm down Selphie. This is only the first step. We still don't know what to do about Quistis. Edea suggested we talk to some of the scientists who worked with Dr.Odine on the Crystal Ashen. Maybe we can find a way to reverse the possession." she said, glancing at Edea. The former sorceress nodded.

"I hope so. Selphie, there is so much to be done." she said with a sigh. Selphie smiled.

"But Rinoa wont be blacking out anymore, right? That was kinda scary, especially when we were trying to sneak into a lab!" she said, teasing Rinoa. Edea laughed.

"No, it wont happen again. Rinoa knows how to control it now. Eventually, she will be able to become a sorceress full-time, like I was. Until then, she will remain mortal, and only become a sorceress when needed." Edea assured her. Rinoa rubbed her bare arms, shivering in the fresh breeze.

"Let's go inside." she said. The three walked back to the stone

house.  
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"Galbadia Garden."

Fujin opened the door for Sorceress Oriscala, stepping aside to allow her and Squall to pass before her. Fujin was looking pale and thin, as was Squall. They hadn't eaten for two days, but neither appeared to notice.

"It's empty," said Squall, looking around suspiciously. Oriscala laughed hollowly.

"Of course. I sent my army on ahead of us. They seem to have cleared up well." She took a few steps forward down the halls of the silent Garden. It was disturbing, to find the place so empty. Squall felt a strange sense of deja vu, as if he had seen this Garden in a similar state before.

"Have I been here before?" he asked himself quietly. Oriscala spun around to face him, looking angry.

"Squall, you have never been here." she stated simply. Oriscala pushed open the double doors which led into the main hall and smiled smugly at what she saw, gasping in delight. Fujin stepped up next to her, gagged, and turned to Squall, her good eye wide in shock. Squall frowned, and went to see what it was. His mouth dropped open in shock.

Inside the main hall of the Garden were all the SeeD's and cadets which had inhabited it. Most of them had their weapons out, but some were unarmed, mostly the children. All had expressions of agony and suffering on their faces, and all were dead. Oriscala took a step forward to the pyramid of bodies, which was all that remained of the student body of the Garden. Squall didn't find it as shocking as Fujin. His mind was too numb from the heavy magic Oriscala had put on him. She stroked the body of one of the fallen SeeD's, gloating over the corpses. All of the dead were under the age of twenty.

"Look! All of the despicable SeeD!" she cried like an excited child, flitting from body to body, gasping over them, gazing at them almost lovingly. Fujin stepped close to Squall, and he was surprised to feel her slip an arm through his.

"Squall," she whispered. He looked at his companion and saw her gazing at him with her strange, colourless eye. She didn't say anything more, but he squeezed her arm gently, to let her know he understood. He too felt that this was strangely surreal, and disturbing. He was finding it hard to think, and couldn't remember anything before yesterday. Fujin was the same. Eventually, Oriscala got tired of examining her treasure, and turned back to her servants.

"Come on." she ordered, leading them through to the next room. Here, there were more bodies, but these ones were alive. Fujin recognised

Lucia, one of the Garden faculty members who she had known before she transferred to Balamb Garden. Fujin stared at her coldly. Lucia was never one of her favourite people.

Oriscala smiled sweetly at the people who had been locked in the room. They were all adults, and included the new Headmaster of Galbadia Garden, Minov. He took a few steps towards Oriscala, an angry expression on his face.

"What is going on?" he demanded. Oriscala's face was cold. She took a step towards the Headmaster.

"I have destroyed this Garden. One by one, all the Gardens will fall. Galbadia, as the weakest, was my first option," she said with a gloating smile, thinking of all the bodies in the next room. Minov was livid.

"You can't do this! You, you're Squall Leonhart, you are the Commander of Balamb Garden! How can you let her do this!?" he cried to Squall incredulously. Squall gazed back at the shorter man.

"I am her Knight." he said simply. The other members of faculty in the room stared at Squall, unable to believe the leader of the most respected Garden was under her control. Minov stepped up to him.

"What the hell do you think you are doing, Leonhart?! Is Balamb Garden in alliance with this...witch?!" he asked Squall angrily. Squall just stared back coldly.

"Don't insult Quistis." he said. Minov laughed bitterly.

"Oh, I see. She has you under her spell. You honestly believe this monster is Instructor Treppe?" he said, his voice rising to a shout towards the end of his sentence. Oriscala got angrier and angrier.

"Enough!" she cried. Squall held his sword at Minov's throat. The older man looked scared for the first time. Oriscala smiled.

"Squall, we don't need him. Get rid of him," she said. Squall, without hesitation, slashed open Minov's throat. The other man let out a strangled cry which was cut off as the silver blade tore through his throat. He fell to the floor, twitching, as the other members of faculty moaned and gasped. Oriscala raised her arms.

"You will do as I say! I will have no hesitation to kill you should you become a problem." she warned them. Lucia stepped forward.

"Sorceress, we are your servants," she said, bowing respectfully to Oriscala. Then she rose, and looked Fujin in the eye. Oriscala watched her, and glanced at Fujin. Oriscala turned to her female servant.

"Fujin, is this woman a friend of yours?" she asked. Fujin shook her head.

"She was the reason I lost my eye." Fujin said bitterly. Lucia's face twisted.

"You little bitch! That wasn't my fault! If you hadn't been stupid enough to listen when I told you to..." Oriscala interrupted her.

"Stop. Fujin, do you want her to die?" she asked. Oriscala was enjoying this. Fujin stared back at Lucia.

"No." she replied. Lucia smiled.

"Thankyou Fujin, I'm so sorry I..." Fujin cut her off.

"I want to rip \*her\* eyes out." she said coldly, with a trace of a smile on her delicate features. Lucia gasped, and took a step back. Oriscala turned her back on the pair of women.

"Then do as you please Fujin." she said with a smile, leaving Fujin as she and Squall walked to the door.

Oriscala laughed as the agonised screaming filled the air.

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Ellone sat in the corner of the room crying. Every now and then she would glance over to the corner where her adopted father's body was. She had covered him with one of the throws which had covered the rich sofa's in the throne room, but she was not strong enough to move him. She felt as if her world was falling apart. Laguna...he was all she had left of her life in Winhill. He and Squall, they were her only family.

She felt her heart ache. It was a real, physical ache, and she clutched her hands together to her chest, trying to get rid of it. She was bent over as she sat, as if she had stomach cramps, her short brown hair falling over her face. Laguna...he was dead. She couldn't deal with it. And the fact that his own son had murdered him...it was too sad. "God, Squall, why did you do it?" she murmured to the silent room. The rain beat down on the huge glass windows, the only sound apart from her quiet crying. She couldn't believe Squall had taken away the only person she had known practically her whole life. Now what was she going to do? By herself, alone in this huge palace.

Ellone gasped as the door slowly began to open. Jumping to her feet, she glanced around the room for something she could protect herself with. There was nothing. She glanced to the corner, feeling sick momentarily as she saw the bloodstained corpse of Laguna. Her eyes went back to the door, and she could feel her hear thudding as it opened.

"President Laguna?" asked a calm voice. Ellone sighed with relief. It was one of the secretaries which worked in the building. She walked towards the door.

"Come in," she said wearily. The secretary pushed open the door and stepped in, bowing to Ellone respectfully. She nodded, and bit her lip.

"Laguna...he's dead," Ellone said in a trembling voice. The secretary gasped, running towards the body of the President. Ellone hugged her middle anxiously as the secretary stood.

"Come with me," he ordered. Ellone recoiled at the harshly spoken words.

"What? Why?" she asked, suddenly afraid. The secretary pulled a gun from within his clothes.

"Come on. Move!" he ordered her. Ellone frowned.

"You can't speak to me like that. I'm the President now! Who do you think you are!" she said, outraged and upset. The secretary cocked the gun.

"Move. Or I will kill you." he said. Ellone felt anger building inside her.

"No!" she screamed running towards him. On impulse, he fired the gun. The bullet hit Ellone on the shoulder, spinning her around and throwing her back a couple of metres. She fell to the ground motionless, and the secretary walked over to her. Lifting her easily, he carried her from the room, ignoring the body in the corner.

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Oriscala stood over the two as they ate. Fujin and Squall looked almost dead, as they reluctantly ate what they had found in the kitchen of the Garden. All but seven of the faculty members were dead now, killed by Fujin and Squall. Oriscala herself didn't do any killing. It was for her servants to do.

Eventually, they began to look human again. Although still pale, they didn't look as grey as before, and they both felt much better. They had actually slept for a few hours, and had time to refresh in the Garden's dormitories. Oriscala herself seemed reluctant to sleep, and only ate the bare minimum of what she could. Squall glanced at Fujin as she sat across the table from him, eating a piece of bread slowly. Her eye was downcast, and she seemed sad. He himself was feeling confused, even thinking straight was a struggle. It was as if he was drugged, and his mind was swimming through mud to reach conclusions. The Sorceress made things clearer for him though. Whenever he was confused about why he was there, or about something she asked him to do, she reminded him he was doing this to protect Rinoa and Quistis, and reminded him of his guilty wish to kill Rinoa, and that she was helping him to overcome that. Of course, he believed her. It was easier than trying to figure things out for himself.

He had been feeling something strange though. Like a piece of himself was missing. Ever since they had gone to Esthar, he felt as if

something was wrong, as if something had been done which was terrible, but he had no way of reversing it. Squall tried not to think about it though, it was too hard right now. All he wanted to do was obey Oriscala. She was the only thing which gave him peace right now.

"We will leave here soon. Galbadia has been taken care of. Next we will move onto Deling City, I'm sure that wont be a problem though. If I'm not mistaken, they don't deal very well with Sorceress'!" she said with a laugh. Squall frowned, a memory flashing into his head of Deling City...a mansion...and a sniper...

"Deling City..." he murmured. Oriscala smiled at him.

"Yes, you've been there. Rinoa's father lives there. Don't you remember? It was then you were ordered to kill Rinoa. With a sniper named Irvine Kinneas." she said maliciously. Squall nodded slowly.

"Yes, I remember. We were ordered to kill the Sorceress by Garden. Kinneas was the sniper sent to kill Sorceress...Rinoa. But, we failed," he said with difficulty. Oriscala smiled.

"Yes. Poor Sorceress Rinoa, she was possessed even back then." she said, looking at Squall intently. He looked sad.

"Yes...she must have been." he said softly. Fujin was staring at Squall. She looked troubled.

"Who was Edea?" Fujin asked sharply. Oriscala looked at her angrily. Squall looked confused.

"Edea?! She was never a Sorceress. She was no-one. Someone Seifer knew from his childhood," she said quickly. Fujin seemed satisfied and continued to eat. Squall frowned.

"Edea..I know that name," he said. Oriscala sighed.

"Forget her." she ordered. Squall nodded. Oriscala glided towards the exit, looking behind at her two companions.

"Let's go. To Deling City." she said with a smile.  
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"Rinoa, I've got a gift for you," Edea said with a smile. Rinoa stood up from her cross-legged position on the floor and walked over to her tutor. Edea led Rinoa to a cupboard from which she drew out a long black dress. Rinoa gasped.

"Your Sorceress' outfit! I can't accept this!" she said. Edea smiled.

"Please. It is special. When you wear it, you feel confidence. It symbolises strength, virtue, power. You are a very important Sorceress now Rinoa, you must have an important dress." she said,

giving it to Rinoa. The younger girl smiled, touching the black silk tentatively.

"It's beautiful." she said. Edea took out a beautiful, ornate headdress from the cupboard.

"This is one which I had made for the girl who received my powers. It was a tradition, long ago, that the older Sorceress would make a headdress for her protégée. Unfortunately, now, Sorceresses don't consider who is to receive their powers until it is too late. I didn't have a choice when I relinquished my powers. But I am glad they went to you." she said warmly. Rinoa was touched.

"Thankyou, Matron," she said with a grateful smile. Edea went to the door.

"Get dressed. You will all have to leave soon. I think you should get going. You are ready now, Rinoa." she said, pride in her voice as she looked at her pupil. Rinoa nodded, and began to undress as Edea left the room.

Stepping into the black dress and doing up the almost invisible hooks on the front, Rinoa looked at herself in the cracked mirror. She looked so different. Like a real Sorceress, not like a little girl who pretended to be one. For a moment, Rinoa felt a great sense of power, as if she was omnipotent, and could have whatever she wanted. Then she caught sight of the ugly expression on her face, and the thoughts of power left. She looked at the bed, at the headdress which was lying there. It was beautiful, mottled blue and green turquoise with long peacocks feathers flowing backwards. A sparkling deep blue sapphire was set in the middle of the headdress.

Rinoa gathered her hair on top of her head and fit the headdress on over it. She gasped. She looked so...regal. Her long neck was bare, and the neckline of the dress went down quite low and was wide, revealing the curve of her breasts and her collar bone. Normally, Rinoa would be uncomfortable in such a revealing gown, but this was different. It wasn't promiscuous, but held a sort of imperial aura. The black feathers which made up the collar of the dress rested on her shoulders, and shimmered in the light. Rinoa wondered what kind of bird they came from. Looking down, she noticed that although the dress was primarily black, it faded to white at the very bottom, where it became jagged as it touched the floor. She wondered what that meant, and made a note to ask Edea about it later. She had mentioned that the dress was full of symbolism.

Rinoa hung up her own clothes in the cupboard, and left the room to find Edea. Before she found her though, Selphie and Irvine passed. Irvine's mouth dropped open.

"Rinoa! Damn, you look hot!" he said to her, gazing at the low neckline of the dress with open admiration. Selphie grinned at Rinoa.

"Wow. Did Edea give that to you? I can't believe how....impressive you look." she said, full of awe. Rinoa smiled shyly.

"Yes. She told me to wear it now that I am a real Sorceress. And...she made this for me," she said, touching the headdress. Selphie gasped.

"Oh! It's beautiful!" she said, gazing at the jewel in the middle.  
Rinoa laughed.

"I know. I can't believe I'm allowed to wear something so beautiful!" she said. Just then, Cid and Edea walked in. Edea smiled at Rinoa.

"You look beautiful. And very Sorceress-like," she said with a smile. Cid nodded.

"Yes, Rinoa. You look great," he said. Edea put her hand on his arm.

"Cid and I have been talking. We've decided to leave here, and go to Balamb Garden. Xu can't manage by herself forever." she said. Selphie spoke up.

"Will you take over again as Headmaster?" she asked. Cid laughed.

"Yes, but don't worry Selphie. As soon as Squall is fit to assume his role in Garden I will relinquish the responsibility to him again." he said reassuringly. Selphie smiled, relieved.

"So we will part then. I heard the Sorceress Oriscala recently took over Galbadia Garden. Her next target will most likely be Deling City. I suggest you go there as soon as possible. You are all ready now Rinoa." Edea said with a conspiratory smile to her pupil. Rinoa returned it nervously. Selphie looked happy.

"Great! Let's get Seifer and go!" she said. Edea laughed at her impatience.

"I would like to say goodbye to you all first. Where is Seifer and Zell?" she asked. Selphie smiled.

"Not together, that's for sure. I think I saw Seifer on the beach. Zell's probably eating." she said with a laugh.  
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"The citizens of Deling City will not obey a Sorceress. I know that for sure. After that fool Ultimecia," she murmured to Fujin. The grey haired girl stood still as Oriscala paced in front of her. She cleared her throat nervously.

"Maybe...maybe you should make them believe that you are acting in their best interests. Turn them against someone...someone who you can convince them is evil. Like Rinoa." she said. Oriscala smiled.

"Of course! Squall already thinks the little bitch is possessed...if I could convince him, I can convince the pathetic citizens of that city." she said with a gloating smile. Fujin nodded.

"Squall...he is very confused. But must he be under such strong

magic? I'm..."

"Worried about him? Fujin...you don't have feelings for him, do you?" Oriscala asked her mockingly. Fujin looked anxious.

"No, I just...he's the only link I have left to Seifer." she said, feeling defeated. Oriscala turned away from her.

"Fujin, you know how strong he is. If he began to think about this...then he might get in our way. And I wouldn't want to have to kill him." she said with a smile. Fujin sighed.

"I don't like lying to him." she said bravely. Oriscala looked at her, with a raised eyebrow.

"Really? Fujin, I'm surprised at you. You've done far worse things in your time than lying..." She taunted. Fujin gave up.

"Sorry." she muttered. Oriscala turned away.  
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Fujin watched Squall as he slept. She wondered what was going on in his head. Oriscala had led him to believe that Rinoa was possessed by an evil Sorceress, and that was the reason why he felt such revulsion to her whenever she became a Sorceress. He believed that by becoming Oriscala's Knight, he was protecting Rinoa, and in the process stopping Quistis from getting hurt by Rinoa. Oriscala had explained to him that Rinoa was out to get her, and if she managed to kill her, Quistis would die as well. But by keeping Rinoa away, Squall was protecting both of them. Fujin knew what a pack of lies this was.

She wished she could tell Squall the truth, but then she might as well commit suicide. Oriscala would kill her for sure, or even worse, turn her into one of those little dwarf things which followed her around like little shadows. Fujin sighed. Poor Squall. He was even more exhausted than she was, due to all the magic placed on him. She wondered what effect it was having on him. Maybe it was poisoning him also. Fujin didn't care. All she wanted was to get back to the way things were.  
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The Palace at Deling City was empty. The tall ceiling of the beautiful throne room was painted with pictures of angels, and Sorceresses. It was the perfect place for Oriscala to make her proclamation to the people, warning them of the new evil about to invade their city, the Sorceress Rinoa.

Oriscala sat on the throne, smiling at her two servants who sat on either side of her. She could hear the hum of people outside the

hall, and eventually the door opened, admitting only one into the room. Oriscala smiled benevolently at the president of Galbadia, Diola. He had been one of Vinzer Deling's underlings, but had managed to climb to the top in the unrest following the assassination of the President. Diola bowed to Oriscala, and smiled smugly at her.

"It is an honour to have you in our city, Sorceress." he said to her. The man had a lisp, and was short and balding, with eyes which flitted from side to side suspiciously.

"I must have an audience with the people. I need to warn them of a great evil which is looming over your city." she said charmingly. He looked concerned, and coughed quietly.

"Your Excellency, the public, they don't....what I mean is, the last Sorceress here.."

I know what happened last time." she said quickly he bowed again. The Sorceress smiled.

"Do you want war, Diola? Do you want Deling City to have the power it once had?" she asked him softly. Diola shook his head, looking at her sideways.

"No, of course not." he said indignantly. Oriscala smiled.

"Of course. You don't want Garden gone. You don't want the Galbadian Army the best in the world. You don't want to be respected instead of sneered at by your peers." she said mockingly. Diola frowned.

"What are you saying?" he asked

"You can have all that. By co-operating with me. I can make you a King, not just a President." she hissed. He looked interested.

"How?" he asked in a low voice.

"Declare war on Garden. All which remains is Balamb. Esthar Garden is too new and unorganized, Trabia is still under construction, and Galbadia has been eliminated. Balamb is the only real threat." she said quietly. Squall and Fujin didn't flinch at the mention of their home being destroyed.

"But...we aren't strong enough to fight Balamb Garden. Their Seed's are elite, better than any others, better than our army. We would be defeated easily." he said regretfully. Oriscala laughed.

"Do you have any intellectual value at all?" she asked him. He flinched at her harsh words.

"Destroy them from the inside. We already have a powerful weapon." she said, glancing at Squall. Diola looked confused.

"What?" he asked her. Oriscala put her hand on Squall's.

"Do you recognise this man?" she asked Diola softly. He glanced at Squall, looking him up and down.

"No." he replied, uninterested. Oriscala smiled lovingly at Squall.

"He is Squall Leonhart." she said smugly. Diola gasped.

"The Commander of Garden?" he asked incredulously. Oriscala smiled.

"Yes. He is my Knight."

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Seifer walked along side Rinoa as they proceeded to the Palace. She was dressed as a Sorceress, and was strangely calm. Seifer walked close to her, his sword drawn. People who saw them stepped aside, looking at the pair in awe. They were very striking. She, dressed all in black, and he was in white. Because of the distraction Rinoa and Seifer served as, no-one noticed the three SeeD's following them.

They walked right up to the Presidential Palace. Rinoa shuddered, feeling the power waiting within. "She's already there." Rinoa whispered to Seifer. He nodded, and checked his gunblade was loaded. Selphie walked close to Irvine, and Zell followed the pair, looking around nervously. They all entered the Palace, and pushed through the people to the main hall, where a female voice could be heard over a stereo system.

"Citizens of Deling City!"

Selphie bit her lip anxiously. That was the Sorceress.

"You are in great danger!"

Rinoa frowned. What was she up to?

"There is a great Sorceress, one which means harm to you!"

Seifer glanced at Rinoa. She looked pale, and he was sure she was trembling.

"She was born in this city, and she will return here to kill you all!"

Irvine stepped up to Rinoa. "What's going on?" he whispered. Rinoa made no response.

"Her name is Sorceress Rinoa."

"No," whispered Rinoa. She turned to Seifer. "Get me out of here," she whispered in a frightened voice. They turned, but the crowd had shut behind them too thick to escape. Rinoa suddenly felt very afraid. If she had sensed the other Sorceress' presence, she surely knew Rinoa was there.

"She is possessed. She was trying to kill me, and I was one of her friends once. Rinoa herself is not evil, but the Sorceress inside her

is. Please, citizens of Deling City, trust me to help you get rid of this menace!" she implored them. A great cheer rose from the audience. Rinoa yelled to the others, but her voice was lost in the thunderous applause.

"Lets go! This is dangerous!" she cried. Seifer took off his long white coat, and put it around her shoulders.

"This will help hide you," he said. She nodded gratefully, and the five of them managed to push their way through the crowds to the entrance. Once out in the fresh air, the cheers from the crowd inside seemed distant.

"This is terrible," Rinoa said sadly. Seifer glanced back at the hall.

"We must confront her. But by ourselves. We have no chance if the whole city is on her side." he said gravely. In the cold dark of the city, they all felt terribly alone.

"Where shall we go?" asked Selphie, shivering. Seifer turned to Rinoa.

"I know you wont like this, but..."

"Fine." she said with a sigh. "Let's go to my house." she said reluctantly. Seifer smiled at her, and they began walking.  
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"He's not home. Do you want to wait for him inside? I'm sure he wouldn't mind," said the servant who opened the door warmly. Rinoa sighed in disgust.

"I don't care whether he would mind or not. Just let us in." she said rudely. The servant hesitated. Rinoa got angry.

"Do you know who I am? I am Rinoa Heartilly. And a powerful Sorceress. So let me in now!" she said. Seifer put a hand on her arm.

"Rinoa, calm down. She was only doing her job." he said to her. Rinoa sighed.

"I know. But I hate this place." she said. The servant opened the door wide for them, stepping aside silently to let them in. Rinoa went in first. They all walked to the main room, which was far nicer than the small study they had been forced to wait in last time. Rinoa stood, while the others sat on the chairs. Eventually, a male servant came into the room.

"Is...everything alright?" he asked, staring at Rinoa. He obviously didn't recognise her.

Rinoa remembered him though. He had looked after Rinoa as a child. She smiled at him.

"Yes, everything's fine. Where is my father?" she asked him. The servant looked at her closely, then recognition dawned on his face.

"Miss Heartilly! I didn't recognise you...you look so different..." he said in shock. Rinoa smiled.

"I know. I'm a Sorceress now." she said. He nodded.

"Yes, Patricia said. I'm afraid you scared the poor girl..." he said. Rinoa laughed.

"Oh well. Anyway, where is he tonight anyway?" she asked.

"There is a huge meeting in town. A kind of party, I was told. A new Sorceress is there. General Caraway is in town to meet her." he said. The smile left Rinoa's face.

"Oh no," she murmured.  
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"You evil bitch!" Caraway yelled, rushing towards the Sorceress. The physical attack took her by surprise, and she fell backwards as he ploughed into her. Squall and Fujin immediately jumped to her defence. They were alone with him and Diola in the massive hall, the audience had left. Squall and Fujin descended from the stage, weapons ready to attack Caraway.

But the Sorceress seemed perfectly capable of looking after herself. She rose, blood dripping from a small cut on her head, and shook off Caraway effortlessly, flinging him into a nearby table, breaking his arm. She looked livid.

"Who are you?" she hissed angrily. He clenched his fists and stared furiously at the Sorceress.

"Rinoa's father. General Caraway." he said. Sorceress Oriscala sighed, and reluctantly cast Curaga on him. The broken arm healed. He looked surprised.

"Aren't you going to kill me?" he asked bitterly. She shook her head, sending her beautiful curls over her shoulders.

"No. I'm not going to do the same as Ultimecia." she said, with a small smile. "So, you are General Caraway. I thought you and your daughter don't get on?" she said mockingly.

"We don't. But I still love her." he said. Oriscala looked sympathetic.

"What a shame. You know Rinoa is evil, don't you?" she said gently. He looked furious.

"My daughter is not a monster!" he seethed. Oriscala laughed.

"Of course not. Rinoa is good, gentle and sweet. Isn't that right Squall?" she said, turning to him. Squall nodded.

"Squall? Squall Leonhart!?" Caraway asked incredulously. Squall gazed at him coldly. Oriscala watched in delight.

"You son of a bitch! Where is Rinoa! You promised to take care of her!" he screamed at Squall, trying to hit the younger man, but was repelled by the energy shield Oriscala had put up. Squall stood.

"I am protecting her! That's why I am here." Squall said. Caraway looked at him with disgust.

"You are despicable. Leaving my daughter for this witch..." he said, livid. Squall gazed back coldly.

"I have protected Rinoa." he said simply. Oriscala began to get bored.

"Enough! Caraway, leave now, and cause no further trouble for me. Otherwise I will ensure your daughter is executed, possessed or not," she said evilly. Squall looked at her.

"What?" he said quietly. Oriscala looked annoyed.

"Go!" she cried to Caraway. With a last angry glance, he man left. Oriscala turned back to Squall.

"I was only trying to scare him." she explained. Squall looked relieved. Fujin watched him closely, willing him to react further. He didn't. Oriscala looked at the man who up til now had sat in the corner of the hall silently.

"Diola, come here." she said in a bored voice. He crept up to her.

"Yes, your Excellency," he snivelled. Oriscala raised a hand wearily and sent a blue light around Diola. He was encased in a blue sphere of light, and those watching could see him screaming and writhing in pain inside the bubble. They couldn't hear anything though, the sphere was completely sound-proof. Eventually, he fell down, and they could see his body transform into a skeleton.

"I wont kill you Caraway. But I am not afraid of doing it. Diola will not be missed, I can just claim he threatened to kill me. But you are another matter...the people respect you. You are too valuable to waste." she said softly to the shut door.  
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They heard a door slam. Everyone looked up as they heard General Caraway's voice in the lobby outside. Rinoa took a deep breath, her eyes on the door. Selphie and Irvine stood up from the couch they had been sitting on. There was a tension in the air as they waited for General Caraway to enter. Eventually, he did.

"What the...Rinoa!" he cried, looking at his daughter with relief. To her great surprise, he ran to her, and embraced her tightly. Rinoa looked stunned. When he released her, she was disturbed to see tears in his eyes.

"What is it?!" she asked him, very worried. Her father never showed emotion, and much less affection.

"Rinoa...you are in such danger. That Sorceress...she wants you dead. She's organising a war against Garden. And she has your boyfriend on her side." he said. He spoke the last sentence with contempt. Rinoa looked sad.

"I know. He thinks he is protecting me." she said sadly. Her father stared at her.

"What's going on Rinoa?" he asked her. She shook her head and moved away from him.

"It's a long story." she said with a sigh.  
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Xu gripped the fax she held tightly. It was bad news. Very bad news. One by one, all the Gardens were being eliminated. She knew Balamb was the strongest, but she didn't know how she was meant to organise the Seed's by herself. With Squall and the others gone, morale had gone rock bottom. The six friends had become legendary at Garden, and to have them disappear signalled something bad.

Slowly, she made her way up the stairs into Squall's now empty office. It was just as he had left it. It was now hers, as she had taken over command of the Garden. But Xu was not the only one who thought themselves worthy of such a position. As a result of the low morale, and the disappearance of the six students, there was unrest in the Garden. Xu didn't know how long she would be able to keep her position of authority.

Xu picked up the phone, looking around the dark office. The blinds were drawn, so that not even moonlight penetrated the gloom. Putting down the phone with a murmur of annoyance at the engaged tone, Xu switched on the lamp to re-read the fax she had been sent.  
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'I, Ellone Loire, have assumed control of Esthar and therefore Esthar Garden. I order you to relinquish Commander Squall Leonhart immediately to the Estharian Army for execution. He is wanted for the murder of President Laguna Loire. If we do not receive the Commander by 1600 hours tomorrow, which is the ninth day of the eleventh month, we will be forced to declare war on Balamb Garden.'  
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It was signed 'President Ellone Loire'. Xu sighed. She didn't know much about the Esthar government, but she had no doubt Balamb was no match for them when it came to warfare. Massaging her temples, Xu

shut her eyes and wondered what she should do. She had about sixteen hours to reply before there was war. She didn't know where Squall was, so even if she did want to turn him over to Esthar, she couldn't. But she would never do that. And anyway, there must be some mistake. Squall a murderer? She didn't know, but she knew he would never kill in cold blood. Or would he? Xu knew him well, but he was a SeeD, and they were trained as assassins. Squall certainly had the training to kill with detachment.

Xu didn't know Laguna was Squall's father. If she had known that, then she would never have doubted him. But she had no idea of the attachments between Squall, Ellone and Laguna. She guessed Ellone was Laguna's daughter from their surnames, but even that wasn't strictly true, as Ellone was adopted. Getting up from the desk, Xu walked over to one of the huge window, pulling open the blind. It opened with a view of the coastline, and from there she could see the waves breaking on the shore. She shut her eyes, leaning her forehead against the cool glass. She didn't know it, but she had a fever from the overwork. The glass felt so nice and cold against her skin. With a sigh, Xu slowly crumpled to the floor in a faint.  
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Lika scuttled across the floor to where Ellone sat cross-legged on the floor. Ellone was doing her best to ignore the creatures, but it was nearly impossible. They hissed and jumped around and pawed at her too much. They did seem a little afraid of her though, and didn't come too close to her when she got angry with them. Ellone stared coolly at Lika as she smirked at Ellone.

"We sent a letter today. Sorceressss Orisssscala's orderssss," she said in her lisping voice. Ellone ignored her. Lika seemed delighted. "We're going to get your brothers Garden...yess we are...they are all going to die...all the dessssspicable SeeD'ssssss." she said, hissing more in her excitement. Ellone sighed.

"I don't care." she lied. Lika laughed.

"Yesss, yess...of course you don't. Oriscala has changed her planssss...Galbadia is too weak to destroy Balamb....so do you know who issss?" she taunted. Ellone shrugged.

"You are!! Hehe...Esssthar Garden, on your orders, is going to war with Balamb Garden!" she said, laughing hysterically.

"No! You can't do that! I will not be responsible for the deaths of SeeD's!" Ellone cried. Lika laughed at her.

"You already are. You signed the letter...you ordered the attack!" Lika shrieked in excitement. Ellone moaned, clutching her head.

"Why...why are you doing this?!" She begged them to tell her. Lika cackled at her distress.

"Esthar...it is to become Oriscala's home soon...you must be out of

the way...Garden must be out of the way. This is just one step in her plan. By using you, she can eliminate both you and Garden at once." she hissed. Ellone looked bitter.

"Why don't you just kill me and Squall then? You'd get rid of two leaders easier then." she said softly. Lika growled.

"We can't. Esthar would retaliate for the murder of their President, and Garden would soon pull itself together, even if Leonhart was to die. Anyway, he is under Oriscala's protection." she hissed. Ellone shuddered, remembering the moment Squall had aimed his gunblade at Laguna...

"You are evil," she said wearily. Lika laughed again.

"I know." she said.

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"So he is under her spell?"

Rinoa nodded. Her father stood, walking over to the window from where he could see the Presidential Palace.

"And you are now a Sorceress..." he said slowly. Rinoa nodded again.

"But I'm not possessed like she said. She made that up to make Squall join her. The Sorceress, I mean, Oriscala, is really Quistis. But Quistis is possessed with this evil Sorceress." she said. Her father nodded, and turned back to Rinoa and her friends.

"How can I help you?" he asked her. Seifer stepped forward.

"We need to see the Sorceress alone. Only then will Rinoa be able to fight her."

"Rinoa? Fight? No, she hasn't had the training all you SeeD's have..." he began, but Rinoa laughed.

"Father, last year I helped defeat Ultimecia. I am now a Sorceress. I have more power than any of my friends." she said with a smile. He sighed.

"I don't like the idea of you going one on one with this....monster." he said. Rinoa sighed.

"I'll be fine. You remember Sorceress Edea?"

"The one you were sent to assassinate last year?" he said dryly. Rinoa bit her lip.

"Um, yeah, well, she's good now. She taught me lots of things. She say's that I'm ready to face the Sorceress." she said. Rinoa's father looked sceptical.

"Then why doesn't she fight this Sorceress?" he asked suspiciously.

Rinoa began to get irritated.

"Because it is my job! She's taken MY Knight, possessed MY friend and is trying to turn the world against ME! This has nothing to do with Matron..."

"Matron?" she ignored him.

"And besides, Edea is no longer a Sorceress. She gave her powers to me. By accident," she said before her father could retort. He sighed.

"Fine. Just take care, alright? I'll try and see what I can do. If you are sure she won't hurt you.." Rinoa didn't reply. He looked at her, but made no comment on her silence.

"I'll go now. Come with me." he said, leading the way back to the Presidential Palace.

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Xu came round when the first light of dawn was breaking. Sitting up, she realised she must have lain there half the night, on the floor of Squall's office. Looking down, she saw that she held a piece of crumpled paper in her hand. Reading it, she shut her eyes, and felt a horrible sinking feeling.

"Oh no..." she murmured. Standing up and dusting herself off, she picked up the phone on the desk and dialled a number. The member of faculty supervising the dormitories answered the phone.

"Dormitory A." he said in a bored voice. Xu cleared her throat.

"This is Xu. Wake up Nida for me, will you? Tell him to come to the Commanders Office stat." she said curtly. There was a mumbled assent and Xu put the phone down, sitting down heavily in the plush swivel chair at Squall's desk. She pulled her fingers through her hair and rubbed her eyes, trying to make herself look a little human before Nida got there.

After about ten minutes, Nida walked into the office in his Seed uniform, looking very tired. Xu looked sympathetic.

"Sorry for getting you up so early." she said. He shook his head.

"It's ok. What did you want me for?" he asked, stifling a yawn. Xu looked grave.

"I received this late last night." she said, passing Nida the crumpled paper. He read it, and his eyes went wide.

"But we don't know where Squall is," he said in a worried voice. Xu nodded.

"I know. And I haven't heard anything about the murder of the President of Esthar, or anything like that. And Ellone Loire...I remembered just a few minutes ago...wasn't she the girl who Edea was looking for last year? The one with special powers?" Xu asked Nida with a frown. He looked at her incredulously.

"You don't know who she is? She's Squall's sister." he said to her. Xu's mouth dropped open.

"What!? His own sister is ordering his execution?" she said with a gasp. Nida looked very concerned.

"Ellone can't really believe he killed his own father," he said, shaking his head in disbelief. Xu looked even more shocked.

"Squall...Laguna..."

"Come on Xu, don't you listen to those two diamond CC girls by the directory gossip at all?" he said to her impatiently. She looked shocked.

"No." she replied. Nida sighed.

"What are we going to do?" he asked her. Xu looked grim.

"There is only one available course of action. War." she said solemnly.  
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Well...how d'ya like it so far?! This took me ages to write...three days. Well, I am on Easter break, and haven't got much else to do with my time ^\_^

Wasn't the death of Laguna sad? I wish I could have given him a funeral or something...but everyone was too busy being either kidnapped or possessed. Do you think Seifer deserves a second chance after what he did to Quistis? I'll have to find a way to resolve that...

Stay tuned for part three coming soon....  
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Part Three ~ The Sorceress' Knight  
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'There are three parts to every trilogy...in part one, the rules are set...in part two...the rules are twisted....in part three....the heroine dies....'  
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Trailer for Scream 3  
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Comments, suggestions etc. to: [Selphie\\_Leonhart@day-dream.co.uk](mailto:Selphie_Leonhart@day-dream.co.uk)

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Part Three ~ The Sorceress' Knight

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Cid and Edea entered the silent halls of Garden, feeling a little disturbed at the peace. Usually, the Garden was buzzing with the chatter of hundreds of students, but today there was absolute silence. The only sounds their own footsteps on the marble floors. The couple went from facility to facility, finding each one deserted.

Eventually, a sound was heard. They heard a woman's voice, speaking clearly and confidently from the main hall, which was the largest room in the Garden, and where all the balls and gatherings were held. Cid opened the door cautiously, and the woman's voice got louder. He was met with the sight of every single pupil in the Garden staring at Xu, who was reading from a sheet of paper which she held. When she finished reading, she paused, gauging her audience's reaction. They appeared to be stunned. Cid decided to listen to what she had to say before revealing himself.

"So. You all see we don't have a lot of options open to us. We have no choice but to go to war with Esthar." she said gravely. There were murmurs from the students, but no-one spoke up directly.

"We already have information from intelligence that Esthar's army is gathered on the Trabia coastline. They can attack within hours. Preparations have already been started for our defence. Nida and Dr Kadowaki will be leading two teams. Nida is the attack team, and Dr Kadowaki, along with the members of faculty, will organise the rest of the defence and medical support. Are there any questions?" she said. Cid noticed that she seemed very tired. One student spoke up.

"Where is the Commander?" he asked curtly. Xu shut her eyes briefly. She had been dreading this question.

"We don't know where he is. Squall Leonhart and his comrades disappeared while on a mission last week. We have had no contact with any of them since." she said solemnly. The student didn't look impressed.

"Why don't we just cooperate with Esthar and agree to find Squall for them? Then we can avoid bloodshed." he said, an edge to his voice which Xu didn't like.

"No way. Squall is our leader, and we will remain loyal to him." she said angrily. Cid decided now was the time to step in, before the student decided to rebel further.

"That's enough! Xu, you've done a good job here." he said to her, walking briskly towards the stage. The students stared at him as he went, as if they were seeing a ghost. Xu smiled gratefully at him as he took her place on the stage.

"I spoke to the missing students last week. Not all of them, but I was able to speak with Selphie Tilmitt, Zell Dincht, Irvine Kinneas,

Seifer Almasy, and Rinoa Heartilly. They have informed me of the current situation, and they have a great deal more insight into it than anyone here. Squall Leonhart, unfortunately, is under the control of a Sorceress, Sorceress Oriscala. Everything which has happened since the disappearance of Instructor Treppe has been because of this woman. She is evil, and the five students are trying to defeat her. But they will need our help. Esthar is NOT under the control of Ellone Loire. It is under the control of the Sorceress. It is she who ordered the execution of Squall Leonhart. Ellone is Squall's sister, she would never do such a thing.

But, it is true that Squall killed the President of Esthar. But he was under the control of the Sorceress at the time. You must all understand, Laguna Loire was Squall's father, and Squall knew that. He wouldn't have killed him. It just proves the extent of power the woman has over him." he said, giving the student who had challenged Xu a meaningful look. The boy refused to meet the headmaster's gaze.

"As most of you know, Rinoa Heartilly, who is now a student at Garden, is a Sorceress. My wife, whom many of you will recognise as Sorceress Edea, has been training her to combat this Sorceress and defeat her. It is them we should be supporting, not Esthar. We have the advantage of knowing exactly what is going on here. Most likely, Esthar is under the control of Oriscala's underlings. They should not be a threat. The Estharian Army, however, is. But you are all elite mercenaries. You will easily be able to defeat the Esthar Army. Despite their size, they are demoralised due to President Laguna's death, and lack the vitality of the students here. Time is short, so I won't go on. But, please, do your best. For Squall, for Garden, and ultimately, for the world." he said. His voice was drowned towards the end by the cheers of the students.  
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"Rinoa...."

Fujin turned to him as she heard Squall talk in his sleep. The pair of them were sleeping in the same room on the Palace, Oriscala had told them to stay together. Fujin guessed she was afraid Squall was becoming immune to her mind control, and might remember too soon what he was doing there. Fujin had no objections to this. She could see no reason for continuing this charade.

Fujin, unlike Seifer, had no wish for personal glory or gain. All she had lived for before was the respect of her two closest friends, Raijin and Seifer. Now both of them had gone, and all she had left was Squall. And the Sorceress, but she knew it would be stupid to give her heart to Oriscala. Squall, he already held someone else's heart. That much was obvious. Fujin needed to live for someone, and she felt wasted here. Used.

Watching Squall as he slept, Fujin felt sorry for him. She could see he was suffering, not only mentally, Oriscala gave them so little time to eat or rest, both of them felt exhausted most of the time. Fujin suspected she did this on purpose, to ensure they were as

acquiescent as possible, so that neither would challenge her authority. Fujin pushed her head back further into the cushion angrily, wishing she could find a way out of this situation.  
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Caraway paused by the double doors to the Palace. He glanced at Seifer, then gave his daughter an intense look.

"Rinoa...are you sure you want to do this?" he asked her in a low voice. Rinoa nodded, and he thought how much more mature and resplendent she was now. She was no longer the slightly spoiled, stubborn girl who had run away to become a princess of her own resistance group, surrounded by weak willed men who were too lazy or subservient to go against her petulant nature. He felt proud of her.

"Yes. I have to do it. I must get him back." she said in a quiet voice, but the restrained energy in her voice was very apparent. Seifer pushed open the door for her.

"My Sorceress." he said with a hint of a smile. Rinoa bit her lip, and gazed into his dark blue eyes.

"Seifer, it will be the last time I am ever your Sorceress." she told him gently. He nodded solemnly.

"I know. You will never be mine Rinoa." he said gravely. Rinoa touched his arm gently.

"I know what you did, Seifer." he hung his head.

"I...Matron told me. I'm so, so sorry," he said, in a genuinely remorseful voice. Rinoa smiled weakly at him.

"I think I'm ready to forgive you." she said, and put her arms around his neck, pulling him into an embrace. Seifer held her close, shutting his eyes tightly, feeling the emotion of the moment welling inside him.

"Thankyou," he whispered, barely audible. Rinoa heard it and smiled. She pulled away from him.

"Let's get this over with." she said with a tight smile, looking round at her friends. Selphie twirled her nunchaku confidently, and gave Rinoa a smile. Irvine checked his rifle was loaded, and Zell punched the air.

They stepped into the Palace.  
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Oriscala's eyes shot open. There was silence in the dark palace, but she sensed the presence of an enemy. She sat up, running a hand through her golden curls before walking to the door. She opened it, and stepped out into the hallway. There was a thick silence, and Oriscala's reptilian eyes searched the darkness for any threat. She walked to the room which she knew Squall and Fujin were sleeping in and opened the door without knocking.

"Get up." she said in a harsh tone. Fujin, who hadn't been asleep, sat up. Almost tenderly, she laid a hand on his chest and shook Squall awake, as he was lying beside her. He looked up, confused, into her face, and she gave him a meaningful look. Glancing at the doorway, he saw the tall figure of Oriscala standing there, looking at the two with contempt. "Isn't this sweet," she said sarcastically. Squall sat up, and he and Fujin took a few steps towards Oriscala, bowing to her, mostly out of fear, as she looked angry.

"Get up, you fools," she said, her voice full of contempt. Squall glanced at Fujin, and from the look she gave him it was obvious that she felt the same way. Oriscala's powers of charm and seduction were certainly wearing off. She stalked to the window, frowning as she looked out to the illuminated arch. It was almost two in the morning, and the streets were empty.

"There is someone here. That insolent, weak little girl who likes to pretend she is a Sorceress. Squall, tonight we will destroy her finally. She is becoming a nuisance." Oriscala said with a tight smile, turning back to her servants. Fujin didn't hide the look she shot Squall this time, and Oriscala frowned as his mouth dropped open in shock.

"Quistis...you can't be serious! I can't harm Rinoa!" he said, confusion in his voice. Fujin watched him as he struggled. She could sense he was close to throwing off the enchantment. Fujin decided to stick her proverbial oar in.

"Rinoa is evil after all." she said maliciously, smiling smugly at Oriscala. The Sorceress looked troubled. Squall clutched his head.

"No...Rinoa isn't. I remember now..." he said, exhaling sharply. His head jerked up, and he pushed his bangs away from his eyes, frowning at Oriscala.

"You...you're the evil Sorceress...you are possessing Quistis! You are evil!" he said, his voice growing in volume. Oriscala scowled, This was the last thing she needed, especially as Sorceress Rinoa was so close...

"Squall, get over it. I am your mistress, you are my Knight. Live with it. Rinoa is nothing, she will soon be crushed when I assume full power. It is only a matter of time, my sweet, until all the women on this planet die, except Fujin and myself. I will have no other Sorceress' challenging me. You, you will be a prince Squall. Think of it! The Sorceress' Knight! Isn't it the stuff of dreams?" she said in a sickly sweet voice, coaxing him into loving her again. He looked at her coldly.

Fujin's stoic heart leapt as she recognised the old Squall coming back.

"That isn't my dream. That was Seifer's dream. I don't want glory, or to be the toy of a wicked queen." he said bitterly, picking up his silver gunblade from where it lay beside the couch. Oriscala hissed as if he had struck her.

"Stop it! Squall, she is nothing! Look at what I am offering you!" she cried to him. He shook his head.

"You are nothing. Rinoa...I almost died for her once, and I would do it a thousand times. Doesn't that show you anything?" he asked her, looking at her with something akin to pity. She clenched her fists into claws, looking desperately at Fujin for help. She was shocked to see her handmaiden gazing at Squall with the kind of open adoration she had only reserved for Seifer before now. Oriscala felt even more bitter than before.

"Go then. Run to your little witch." she spat at him. Squall bowed once, but the gesture infuriated Oriscala.

"Go before I kill you." she said, her voice shaking with rage. Squall stared at her, feeling conflict inside. Most of him wanted to go, but in Oriscala he still saw Quistis, and that made it harder for him to leave her unprotected. Eventually, he turned and walked out the door without a backward glance.

Fujin watched him go, and decided to go for it. "Please..." she said, but the words caught in her throat as Oriscala gave her a flashing glare.

"You want to join him? Continue your little affair? Do you think he would love you instead?" she asked, her voice dripping with venom. Fujin shook her head.

"We weren't...I don't like him in that way..." she stammered. Oriscala flew at Fujin, striking the girl hard across the face. Fujin went crashing into the couch, hitting it with a crack. She fought unconsciousness, and struggled to get to her feet, her lip cut and her cheekbone stinging from the blow. She looked at Oriscala with hate.

"I want to go with him!" she screamed at her. Oriscala let out a cry of rage and her beautiful face twisted into an ugly mask as she began to kick the defenceless Fujin as she lay helpless by the couch. Fujin cried out in pain, and tried to summon her guardian force to protect her, but she couldn't focus her mind in such pain. Her attempt to defend herself were futile, as Oriscala had inhuman strength, and she was livid that Squall had left her. So she took it out on Fujin.

Let me go!" cried Fujin, her body curled up, her arms across her face as she instinctively tried to make herself a smaller target. Oriscala seemed like a demon, attacking, punching, kicking, even tearing at Fujin's hair. All the time she sobbed furiously. It was terrifying to listen to.

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Squall shut the door to the bedroom behind him, and sighed in relief. Everything became clearer now, and he suddenly had an urge to find Rinoa, to check she was alright. Unconsciously, he began running down the long corridors, hoping to find her. Oriscala had said she was there, ordered him to kill her. Squall shuddered inwardly at the thought. Only in his worst nightmares had he ever dreamed such a thing could happen. He rounded another corner, his eyes gradually adjusting to the dark. He bumped into a small desk, and hissed in pain as he bruised his hip. His pullover snagged on something, and while freeing it, he realised he was not in his own clothes. He was still wearing the strange, asexual clothes Oriscala had made him and Fujin wear back in Esthar.

He continued down the corridor, until he heard hushed voices. His heart began to beat faster in his chest, and he felt an ache as he realised one of the voices was Rinoa's. He stepped round the corner, and could see them, with their backs to him, walking cautiously down the corridor.

"Rinoa.." he said in a trembling voice. All five of them turned around, Rinoa with her jet black eyes wide and sparkling. Squall stood at the end of the corridor, gazing at her. Feeling like something had been released inside her, Rinoa ran to him. Squall opened his arms to her, and held her tightly as she clung to him. He buried his face in her neck, finally allowing himself to show emotion in front of her as he cried quietly, privately, his face hidden from the others. But Rinoa knew, she herself was unable to stop the tears as she pressed her cheek against his shoulder, her arms around his neck. She could feel his irregular breath on her neck, his hot tears as they fell on her skin. She could feel his emotion as he shuddered in her arms, releasing all the hurt, the pain, and sadness of the past few days.

She just held him tighter, respecting and loving him all the more for showing her how he felt.

The others watched, Selphie hugged Irvine joyously as they watched the couple. Seifer sheathed his sword, which he had been carrying with a wry smile. "Guess my stint as the \*good\* Sorceress' Knight is over then. I officially retire from this field." he said, with a trace of a smile. Selphie grinned at him.

"Seifer, you were an excellent Knight." she said graciously. Seifer grinned back at her, and she hugged him to show there was no longer any bad feeling between them. Irvine began to get impatient.

"Come on you two. We've got a Sorceress to defeat." he reminded them with a smile. Squall and Rinoa didn't budge.

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Caraway waited anxiously outside the huge Palace. He hated having to send his daughter in there with only, as he thought, a bunch of kids who carried weapons far too advanced for teenagers. Silently, he

cursed Squall for capturing his daughter's heart. If it wasn't for him...Rinoa wouldn't even be at Garden. If he hadn't been so weak to join the evil Sorceress, Rinoa wouldn't be putting herself at risk.

He reproached himself, because deep down he knew that it wasn't Squall's fault. And anyway, if he knew his daughter at all, it would have been her who did all the capturing in their relationship, he thought with a hollow laugh. Rinoa was always forceful, and headstrong. And from what he knew of Squall, he was a decent, hardworking SeeD. Very hardworking, he had read in a newspaper that Squall Leonhart, as well as being the Commander/Headmaster of Garden, was still a student there as well. He must be a good person, if he was willing to do all this for a place he loved.

Caraway glanced at his watch. It was 2 am. It had been fifteen minutes since he had sent his daughter and her friends into that Palace, and he was beginning to worry about whether he was doing the right thing, by just waiting for her. Sitting down on a stone bench which was placed outside the doors to the Palace, Caraway sighed. He wished he had been a bit more understanding in the past towards Rinoa. True, at times she was out of line, and stubborn. But he knew he should have spent more time with her. After Julia's death...he couldn't bear to look at Rinoa.

She had been such a beautiful, cute child. That was the problem. He and Julia had doted on her so much, and when Julia was killed in that horrible car accident, he couldn't bear to look at the little girl who had been pulled from the wreckage crying, covered in blood from numerous superficial cuts and scratches. He couldn't stand listening to her cry alone in the nursery, but couldn't make himself go and comfort her. When Rinoa grew up, and used to sing to her toys, he would yell at her to shut up, and gazing at him, pale and scared, with her innocent jet black eyes. She would never ask why he wouldn't let her sing, but would silently obey.

Her voice was almost identical to her mothers. When he first heard that sweet, childish voice singing in the nursery, it brought back such a hideous feeling of remembrance, conjuring up images of Julia when they had been happy together. Rinoa never sang, even now. She hid in the nursery, and never saw her father except for the occasional dinner, or when he was forced to show her off to various officials who wanted to see the 'family' side of General Caraway. Rinoa had been a polite child. When she around seven or eight, she was quiet, but polite, and would sit quietly at in the huge banquet hall while her father discussed politics with superiors. Their young, pretty wives would fuss over Rinoa, calling her a poor little thing, patting her hands, playing with her raven black hair, smoothing her silk and satin dresses. The young Rinoa, who was sweet looking and chubby, would sometimes perform the dances her ballet teacher made her recite, or show them her paintings, which even Caraway had to admit were far from stunning. But she never sang for them.

Everything changed when they went on a day trip to Timber. Rinoa had been about thirteen, and was sulking because her father refused to let her have the puppy she wanted. She was growing up, and was looking even more beautiful. Her father didn't notice though, nowadays he was always too busy with his work to take much time out to be with Rinoa. It appeared to suit her fine, she never complained.

Then, while in Timber, he had allowed her some time to explore while he spoke to some of the local officials. Rinoa had met Watts and Zane, and they had become friends with her. Rinoa instantly warmed to them, because she had never had any friends before. Unlike most children, she had never been to school, but was tutored at home by various governesses and teachers. She didn't mix with other children, her father had never thought of it. It was strange, and new to her to have someone interested in her. They had told her about their fledgeling resistance group, the Timber Owls. Rinoa was fascinated, and immediately asked if she could join.

At first they were reluctant, as she was the daughter of a very prominent military figure, and if she joined them it would appear like a kidnap. But eventually, they agreed, only if Rinoa left Deling City, after deciding this was what she really wanted. She had to give her father one more chance, they said. Rinoa had agreed, and spent the rest of the day buzzing with excitement. When she got home to Deling City, she had thought long and hard about what she should do. She had even spoken to her father. They had been eating one of their rare dinners together, and she had asked him if he would come to her dance recital the next day. Rinoa had been practising for ages, with another girl, daughter of one of Caraway's superiors, and a very snobby girl. The two of them were putting on a performance in the evening with the rest of their teachers students, normal girls, who couldn't afford private tuition. Rinoa was excited about it, because it would give her a chance to meet some new people. And, she had always loved dancing. She had been reminding her father about it for months now, and he had promised he would be there.

On the actual night, Rinoa had dressed in her best ballet tutu and rose coloured leotard. The audience was small, but full of proud parents, and a small number of officials there to support the girl Rinoa danced with. Rinoa wasn't surprised that her father wasn't in the audience when she arrived there, he said he would be a little late.

She had butterflies in her stomach from excitement, and could barely keep still as her dance teacher arranged her hair and smoothed her skirt, helping her tie on her dancing shoes etc. Rinoa had been flushed with excitement. When her turn came to dance, about an hour into the performance, she was tense with excitement, and when the curtain rose, she scanned the audience for her father. The smile left her face as her eyes darted around the room, searching for him. The taller, older girl nudged her cruelly, reminding her people were watching.

Rinoa stood there, completely still as the piano played, looking for her father. The other girl danced, hissing at Rinoa to get herself together. Rinoa didn't, and her arms fell from the outstretched position she had them in, and sadly, she walked off the stage, ignoring the pleadings from her dance teacher, the angry hissing from her fellow pupil, and the murmurs of the audience.

She undressed, and waited backstage for the performance to finish. Her dance teacher had attempted to cheer her up, but Rinoa hadn't listened. The other girl, the snobby one, had spitefully reminded Rinoa that both her mother and father were there, and they were very annoyed that Rinoa had made a fool of her in front of Deling City's

elite. Rinoa had stared into space, ignoring her too. She sat there, blocking everyone out, until the performance was over. The dancers left, the teachers left, Rinoa remained sitting on a pile of crates waiting for her father to pick her up and take her home. The people came to sweep the stage after the performance, and still Rinoa sat there.

Eventually, they had told her they were locking up, and Rinoa had to leave. A janitor had sat with her until a bus came, taking her right outside her house. The guard at the door of the mansion had told Rinoa her father was at home, and slightly surprised, she went in. He greeted Rinoa with his usual listless fashion, and, forcing herself to remain composed, she asked him where he had been that night. He replied, going over some paper work, and why did she ask? Rinoa didn't say anything, but went to her room without saying a word.

Caraway had regretted that night ever since. It marked the beginning of four years where he wouldn't see his daughter, not until she was seventeen. He had gone into her room the next morning, after being told by a worried maid that her bed hadn't been slept in. He had found her clothes gone, her dance costume thrown in the corner, a picture of her father thrown face down on the bed. He could only guess at what had happened, as there was no note. She had also taken around 50,000 gil from her own personal account.

Sighing, he stood up from the stone bench, wishing he had realised in time what damage his constant work and cold attitude had done to his little girl. But, he thought wryly, she did turn out well. Checking his watch again, he promised himself that one this was over, he would apologise, and try to undo some of the damage done over the past seventeen years. He hoped it wasn't too late.  
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They walked down the corridors, Squall retracing his steps. He walked close to Rinoa, his sword drawn. It glinted in the moonlight filtering through from the large windows. They were silent as they walked, all could sense the strange energy which almost crackled in the air. Seifer walked at the back of the group, feeling uncomfortable, and incredibly guilty, in the presence of Squall. The two still hadn't spoken, only exchanged meaningful looks. Rinoa hadn't spoken to Seifer either, but had given him a smile when she and Squall finally broke apart.

"This is it." said Squall, pausing in front of the door to the bedroom. Rinoa smiled tightly at him, and he pushed open the door, stepping in before her. The room was dark, the curtains were drawn and it was completely silent in the room. Suddenly, the silence was broken by a low moan. Squall gasped, and rushed over to the couch, where he could just make out the prone figure of Fujin. He helped her sit up and gazed at her in horror. Her face was covered in blood. Selphie and Rinoa knelt down beside her.

"What happened to you?!" asked Selphie. Fujin didn't speak. Squall lifted her, and put her on the couch. She smiled at him weakly, her

eye welled up with tears. Squall swallowed hard.

"This is my fault, isn't it?" he said grimly. Fujin shook her head, wincing in pain.

"Fujin...why did she do this to you? Where is she now?" he asked her gently. She sighed.

"She was angry....because I wanted to go with you. She's gone..I don't know where." she said with difficulty.

"You stay here, Fujin. Don't move. We'll come back as soon as we can." Squall said to her. Seifer pushed him away, concerned and unable to hold back any longer.

"Fujin, I'm so sorry I left you," he said, on one knee beside the couch. Fujin's eye went wide when she saw him.

"Seifer?" she whispered incredulously. He smiled at her.

"Do you forgive me?" he asked her. She nodded, tears falling down her bruised cheeks now. He hugged her, cautiously because of how battered she was. Fujin hissed in pain, but smiled.

Squall stood up, and turned back to the others.

"We have to go. She can't have got far." he said gravely. Rinoa and Selphie got up from their kneeling position and followed him. Seifer glanced back at them.

"I'm staying with Fujin." he said. Squall nodded.

"Good." he said, and turned away.  
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Xu smiled at Cid and Edea joyously as the students filed out of the hall. She ran towards them.

"Thankyou! Oh, I can't believe you're back!" she said happily. Cid laughed at her enthusiasm.

"I'm glad you're happy, Xu. I had to come back once I heard what happened to the Commander." Xu nodded.

"Yeah...I didn't know what happened to Squall myself. Is he alright? Do you know what happened to Quistis?" she asked anxiously. Cid shook his head.

"No, I haven't got a clue. Rinoa...she was very concerned about him. But, she's on her way to rescue him." he said with a smile. Xu looked surprised.

"Squall'll love that!" she said with a small laugh. Edea stepped forward.

"Squall will be happy she cares that much. And Rinoa is a lot stronger than she was when she left the Garden." she said in her soft voice. Xu nodded.

"That's good. But, I'm afraid we haven't got much time to wonder about what happened to Squall and the others. We have a war on." she said, glancing at the giant map on the wall behind them. Cid looked troubled.

"Yes. How long until the attack?" he asked. Xu took a deep breath.

"About twenty minutes." she said. Cid nodded.

"Xu, I think it's time you got back into command of your squad. Defence, isn't it?" he asked her with a smile.

"Yes," she said, pleased to relinquish leadership of the Garden. Xu saluted Cid and bowed to Edea, before leaving the hall at a brisk pace to help Dr. Kadowaki with the defensive team. Nida was leading the attack team, and she knew he would do a good job of it. The battle field was set, the Trabia coastline. Balamb Garden had the advantage over Esthar in that they were more experienced, and had a great naval unit. Xu hated fighting like this. She was used to it, and had fought hard in the battle against Galbadia Garden last year. But she was glad to be on the defence team this year.

Walking down the corridors, she could hear the anxious talk about the upcoming battle, and the nervous cadet's murmuring. Xu smiled at the younger SeeD's and cadets as she passed them. All the cadets under the age of ten were in the classroom, under the supervision of a couple of the younger SeeD's. Xu stopped as she passed one of the cadets. It was a young girl, one of Xu's own students. She looked at the older SeeD standing next to her.

"What unit is this?" she asked. He saluted her.

"Defence Squad B." he replied. Xu frowned. She bent down to talk to the tiny girl next to the SeeD.

"Leila, what are you doing here?" she asked. Leila looked frightened.

"I was told...I am old enough," she said. Xu smiled at her.

"Go to the classroom Leila." she said. The 11 year old ran. Xu smiled. The younger ones were enthusiastic, but she couldn't allow them to fight. She finally found Nida standing at the front gate, giving a pep talk to the SeeD's under his command.

He stopped as he saw Xu. "Xu! Are you here to fight?" he asked her. She nodded.

"Of course. Cid is in control now." she said with relief. Nida smiled at her.

"Great. You can take over control of the defence then." he said, saluting his superior. She smiled at him.

"You seem to be doing a good job. I'm leading the defence." she said.

He nodded, and resumed his talk. Xu glanced around at the others, feeling butterflies in her stomach again as she thought of battle. There was no backing out now. Nida finished his talk, and raised his voice to address all of the waiting Seed's. There was around five hundred students gathered for the attack.

"Move out!" he called, leading the first wave. Xu shouted orders and reminders as the running Seed's passed her, encouraging them. This was it, now the adrenalin was flowing. She thought with pride how enthusiastic the brave teenagers were, none over the age of twenty-two. As the final line passed, she turned back to the Garden, and went to give her own talk to the defence teams. This was going to be a long day.

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As they neared the main hall of the Palace, Rinoa tensed. Squall, sensing a change in her, turned to his girlfriend, concerned.

"Is she in there?" he asked her quietly. Rinoa nodded. He looked ahead grimly, checking his gunblade was loaded. Rinoa put a hand on his arm.

"Squall..." she whispered. He gazed at her. She took a deep breath, and lowered her voice so that only he could hear her.

"We've never said it...but I love you. You need to know this, Squall, otherwise you won't be certain, and you might fall to her again. Trust me." she whispered. Squall gazed into her warm eyes, watching as they changed, like swirling liquid, from black to amber. Smiling at her, he replied.

"I know you love me, Rinoa. You don't need to say it." he said quietly. Rinoa smiled.

"Yes, I did. Because you need to hear it. I told Edea, I hate using that word. It is so meaningless. But you understand, until we find a better word, that is the only one I can use," she whispered, feeling her throat tighten as she looked into his face. She was so happy that finally they were complete, finally together, but she knew the biggest test of their relationship was just ahead. Was it possible, that just as they reached nirvana they would be separated? Rinoa prayed this wouldn't happen.

"Do you need to hear it to?" he asked her with a trace of a smile. Blinking back tears, she nodded. Squall wrapped his arms around her, his mouth close to her ear, so she could feel his hot breath on her skin, sending a shiver down her spine.

"I love you." he whispered. He held her for a moment, her hands crushed between their chests as he hugged her. Gently, she pushed him away, freeing her arms.

"Let's get this over with," she said with a smile.

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Oriscala sat by herself on the throne. For a minute, images flashed into her head, of her mother, of her village. She shut them out. Thinking of her mother always made her feel bad. Squall had left her, and she had driven Fujin away in her anger. All her wonderful plans, her vision of the resurrected empire, they were gone...all gone. She was already defeated. For an instant, Oriscala wondered if it was worth it. She could have the empire she dreamed about, but she wouldn't have Squall, Fujin, or even Seifer. She would be left with only those dwarves to love her, and that useless doctor.

Clenching her fists in anger, Oriscala silently damned Squall for leaving her. If only she had killed Rinoa in Esthar, when she was weak, then Squall would have forgotten her. He would never have shaken off the enchantment, never have inspired Fujin to rebel. Oriscala felt a horrible empty feeling inside her as she realized how much she had lost. People often forgot, Sorceress' were still human. They had feelings, they needed friends as much as anyone else.

Oriscala shut her eyes, wishing there was some way she could change the past. She often wished that, more in this life than in her past one. Before she had died, she had fuelled the fire inside her with sacrifices, the joy of seeing others experience the pain and loss she felt everyday made it easier to bear. Not a day went by when Oriscala didn't feel the sick sense of injustice, and an insatiable desire for revenge. Throughout the years, Oriscala's desire to avenge her mother's senseless murder grew and distorted, until it wasn't just against the villagers anymore, it was against all humans. The anger which still burned her inside, her own overwhelming grief at losing the person she loved most in the world still scorched her. She wanted others to feel that pain, to know what the loss did to her.

Opening her eyes again, Oriscala resolved there would be more sacrifices. More than ever. And it would start with six Seed's....

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She looked up as they entered the hall. A fire was burning at the far end, behind Oriscala. The flickering red light made the dark figure look as if she was drenched in blood, reflecting crimson sparks off her satin dress and golden hair. Squall faced her stonily, and Rinoa stepped forward. The rest of the Seed's stepped into the hall, standing silently behind Squall and Rinoa. Oriscala stood.

"Well, you've found me. What now? Order Squall to pierce my heart?" she asked bitterly. Rinoa shook her head. The stone set in her turquoise headdress emitted a soft glow.

"No. We are not here to fight you." she said gently. Oriscala raised an eyebrow.

"Really? Then why are you here?" she asked. Rinoa smiled.

"To recover Quistis. Your time is up, Oriscala. Let Quistis go." she ordered. Oriscala laughed hollowly.

"And return to oblivion? I don't think so." she said harshly. Rinoa took another step forward.

"I said we were not here to fight. That can change, if you want." she warned. Oriscala stepped down from the dais on which she had stood, glaring at the younger Sorceress.

"Rinoa, give it up. You are no match for me! You are merely a child! A headstrong adolescent who thinks she has found true love." Oriscala mocked. Rinoa didn't rise to the bait.

"Give back Quistis." she ordered for a final time. Oriscala gave her a look of contempt.

"Never." she growled. Rinoa sighed, and raised a hand. Oriscala furiously shot magic attacks at Rinoa, before the girl even began casting.

Not one hit it's target. Rinoa looked at Oriscala with a hint of a smile. Oriscala cried out in rage. Rinoa dropped her arms to her sides. "Sorceress Oriscala, please give up. I don't want to fight you." Rinoa said. Oriscala was livid.

"You don't want to fight me?" she hissed, casting Ultima with enough force to level the building. Rinoa was unhurt.

"I won't hurt Quistis." she said softly. Oriscala smiled.

"That was your problem before, wasn't it? Your pathetic boyfriend wouldn't hurt his teacher, so he abandoned his girlfriend!" she spat. Rinoa glanced at Squall. He was staring back at Oriscala, but Rinoa could tell he wasn't falling for it.

"I don't want to have to hurt you," Rinoa said. Oriscala summoned a huge ball of energy, and sent it towards Rinoa. This time, it threw Rinoa backwards, and she fell to the floor with a gasp. Squall itched to run to her, but he didn't. Instead, Rinoa got to her feet unaided, and looked back coolly at Oriscala.

"I see I have no choice." she said quietly. Her lip was split, and blood ran down her chin. Rinoa shut her golden eyes and raised both hands above her head. A massive sphere of blue light gathered above her head, seemingly drawn from the crystal on her forehead. The beautiful light radiating from Rinoa filled every corner of the room with it's pulsating coolness, and refreshed the tired Seed's. Oriscala, on the other hand, shied away from it, shielding her eyes from the glow. Rinoa opened her eyes, and sent the ball of light towards the Sorceress, encompassing her completely.

"No!" she shrieked as the light touched her. The beautiful sphere swallowed Oriscala, and she appeared to absorb it. Rinoa dropped her arms to her side once more, exhausted and drained. Oriscala swayed, and then collapsed to the ground unconscious.

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Seifer gently wiped the blood away from Fujin's face. She felt a sob catch in her throat, she was not used to Seifer being tender with her. Usually he was rough, pushing her around, asserting his authority over her. And she usually acquiesced straight away, lest he became angry with her. To others, Fujin Athen was tough, almost a bully, but Seifer knew better. He owned her heart, and even now she was respectful of him almost to the point of fear.

Seifer stopped as she shuddered, taking the cloth away from her face. She looked at him, and he frowned.

"What is it, Fujin? What's wrong?" he asked her. She shook her head.

"You've changed." she murmured. Seifer sighed, turning his face away from her.

"I know. I'm glad." he said quietly. Fujin smiled. He resumed his gentle cleaning, wiping the blood away from her cheeks, her forehead, her eyes. He looked around, and on the floor saw her black velvet eye patch. Seifer picked it up and dusted it off. He put it on her face, under her hair. She laughed quietly, and he wondered why. She smiled up at him.

"What is this Seifer? Why are you being so nice to me?" she asked with a trace of bitterness in her voice. Seifer looked hurt.

"I realized a lot of things while I was away. One of them was that you are very important to me. I...I treated you so badly in the past. You are my equal, Fujin, if not better than me. Let me make it up to you, please," he said, staring at her with his dusky blue eyes. Fujin smiled.

"Seifer, you know how I feel about you. It hurt me, when you preferred a Sorceress over me. It hurt me even when Raijin was alive, and you and he would talk about the girls you liked. I've always wanted you Seifer. Just you. I don't care if you are evil, if you are with Garden or against it. I know the real value in you." she said in a hushed voice. To Seifer, kneeling beside her, her words were painfully accurate.

"I know how much it hurt you to see Squall commander of the Garden. He gets the power you've always dreamed of, while you get humiliation. And I knew you were in pain when Raijin died." she said, watching his face intently as he tried to turn from her. Fujin touched his hand.

"Don't hide from me Seifer." she said gravely. Fujin sighed. "Do you want me?" she asked, her voice faltering. Seifer stared at her, gazing into her open face. A bruise was rising on both cheeks, and her lips were split open and swollen. But to Seifer, she looked more resplendent than he had ever seen her.

"Of course I do," he whispered, kissing her softly.

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Squall caught Rinoa's body gracefully as she fell, kneeling to the ground with her limp body in his arms. It was like a dance step, the two of them perfectly in time, as she fell into his waiting arms, her eyes falling shut, her ornate headdress tumbling, freeing the cascading raven strands of hair over her shoulders. He dropped to one knee, supporting her as she fell, staring into her peaceful face. To those watching, it seemed in slow motion as the two assumed a dramatic, and elegant, stance.

"Rinoa....you did it," he whispered to her as her eyes flickered open. As she lay in his arms, she reached up with one hand to his face, touching his smooth, pale cheek with her gloved hand. She smiled at him, and blinking, her eyes slowly transformed to onyx, the yellow in them melting away like liquid gold before Squall's eyes. He smiled at her, kissing her fingers as she brushed them over his lips. She sighed with a tiny smile, and closed her eyes. After gazing at her for a few seconds, he slipped a hand under her legs, lifting her up.

Selphie ran to him, a wide smile on her face. He met her dancing eyes with his own, and grinning, she looked at the exhausted Rinoa in his arms, before bending over to collect the beautiful headdress from where it had fallen. As Selphie watched, the stone in it began to glow, then faded. Irvine crossed the aisle to her.

"We should get her," he said, looking over to the fallen Sorceress. Selphie sighed.

"I guess. You or Zell will have to carry her back to Caraway's." she said, admiring the feathers in the headdress. Irvine sighed.

"Fine," he said with a shrug, and crossed to the Sorceress. Lying unconscious, she looked so unlike the threatening monster of a few minutes ago, and more like their own Quistis. Irvine knelt to pick her up, cradling her gently. She was lighter than he expected, and didn't move as he touched her. He half expected her eyes to fly open, and for her to perform some horrifying new stunt which would annihilate them all. But it never came, and her body remained that of a defeated enemy.

"Let's go," he said, turning back to the others. Selphie smiled at him warmly, and walked by his side as they left the dark Palace. Squall was ahead of them, carrying the sleeping Rinoa. They looked so happy, so sweet together, Selphie felt elated. Everything seemed like it was going to work out fine. Then, she remembered. They still had to find a way to get Quistis back. She glanced at the unconscious Sorceress in Irvine's arms. She looked so innocent, and deceptively exquisite. Selphie wished she had a fraction of the Sorceress' beauty.

Selphie knocked on the door to one of the bedrooms as they passed it, remembering Fujin and Seifer. She opened the door, and was met with

the site of Fujin and Seifer embracing by the window, bathed in the moonlight. Selphie grinned, but, forcing herself to keep a straight face, cleared her throat. Seifer looked at her over Fujin's shoulder, and smiled. Selphie winked at him, and he pulled away from Fujin.

"Selphie. Is everything..." he said, almost afraid to ask. Selphie grinned.

"The Sorceress is unconscious. Rinoa is asleep, and everyone else is fine. We're going back to Caraway's, and we will keep Oriscala there until we find a way to get Quistis back." she said, smiling at the two. Fujin nodded.

"I might be able to help you there." she said in her husky voice. Selphie looked surprised. Fujin continued. "I know where the doctor is who implanted the Crystal Ashen. He might be able to reverse this." she said. Selphie clapped her hands.

"That's great! Come on, lets go." she said, rushing out of the room to tell Irvine. Fujin turned to Seifer.

"Let's go," she said softly, with a private smile to him. He grinned back, and stroked her jagged grey bangs, smoothing her hair behind her ear. She gave him a softly reproaching look, and turned away with a smile. Seifer put his arm around the petite girl's shoulder's, and they walked after Selphie and the others.  
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"Go! Now!" Xu yelled at the top of her voice. All she could hear were explosions, cries of pain and anger, and the clash of swords. The battle was intense, and although most of the Estharian Army had been defeated on the beaches of Trabia, and even more in the waters of Balamb, a good two hundred troops had managed to get through to attack the Garden.

Xu yelled orders until her voice was hoarse, and even then she didn't stop. Running until she thought her heart would give out, pulling the wounded Seed's to relative safety, fighting for her life when she came across a soldier. She almost felt like crying, there seemed no end to this battle. She could hear explosions from machine guns, and every now and then she heard a grenade go off, and she knew a few more students were dead. Seed's didn't use grenades. Running from facility to facility, she checked on the Seed's there, ensuring they had enough ammunition, and helping to remove the dead and wounded.

Eventually, Xu saw a familiar figure through the fighting. Celesa, the librarian, was attacking an Esthar soldier with her long staff. The young Seed was powerful, despite her diminutive size and calm looking exterior. It hid a vitality and strength not many knew about. Avoiding the combat, Xu came to the aid of Celesa, who she noticed was wounded. Xu kicked the soldier hard in exactly the right place to make him fall. Then, while he was still falling, she brought her arm down hard on his neck, killing him instantly. Celesa flashed her a

grateful smile, and immediately leapt back a step, then flipped forward to knock away the soldier who had been creeping up on Xu.

"Thanks!" Xu gasped, staring at the huge knife the soldier held, obviously intending to plunge it into her. Celesa breathed in deeply, wincing in pain as she felt her cracked ribs. Xu looked sympathetic.

"Go to Dr Kadowaki!" Xu shouted over the fighting. Celesa shook her head.

"No! I've got to keep fighting!" she yelled back, swinging her staff round to injure another soldier. Xu aided her by using a powerful kick and punch combination. Celesa watched her in admiration. Xu was well known as one of the best martial artists in the Garden. Second only to her Zell, thought Celesa with a smile.

Xu turned back to Celesa. Celesa was looking around the Garden, a troubled look on her face. Xu saw why she was confused, and sighed in relief. Almost all of the Estharian soldiers were either dead, or were in the process of being severely thrashed by Seed members. Xu smiled.

"It's over," she breathed.  
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"She looks so...innocent," Selphie said in wonder, gazing at the beautiful Sorceress lying on the couch where Irvine had laid her. They were in Caraway's mansion, and all of them appreciated the transition from the dark, gothic Palace to the warm, well lit house, which was full of helpful servants. Irvine put his arm around Selphie's shoulders casually.

"Yeah...well, it's always the ones who look innocent...turn out to be the worst of all. I mean, look at you," he said with a grin. Selphie punched him lightly.

"I do not look innocent." she said. Irvine tipped his hat to her.

"Course not. Big green eyes...earnest little face....small, but beautifully shaped..."

"Irvine!"

"What? I was talking about your....nose," he said innocently. She glared at him, and turned away. He laughed, and hugged her from behind. She smiled, putting her hands over his.

Across the room, the other Sorceress was also lying on a couch. Rinoa's father watched from afar as Squall knelt beside her. He decided it was best to let him be with her. Caraway wasn't going to interfere.

Rinoa eventually opened her eyes. Blinking, she smiled, and let out a little gasp of delight as she saw Squall near her. Sitting up, she flung her arms around Squall, pressing her face against his neck. He wrapped his own arms around her, stroking her jet black hair. She sighed happily, breathing in his scent, burying her fingers in his hair. Pulling away slightly, she looked him in the eyes, and then kissed him lightly on the mouth. He held her tighter as she parted her lips, allowing him to kiss her the way he had longed to since they were reunited. She almost cried again, realising this was all that she ever wanted.

Eventually, the silence in the room let the entwined couple know that they were the centre of attention. Pulling away from Rinoa, Squall glanced up to see his friends, all watching him and Rinoa delightedly. Selphie could barely contain her excitement. Looking back down to Rinoa, Squall saw that she was smiling at him. He laughed, and kissed her cheek before getting to his feet. Giving his friends a mock annoyed look, he smiled at them. Irvine began to clap. Selphie and Zell joined in, and eventually everyone in the room, with the exception of the unconscious Sorceress, was clapping to welcome Squall back. He almost blushed.

"Thankyou." he said in a low voice. Rinoa stood up, and smiled at him. Selphie ran over to Squall and threw her arms around him. He staggered back a few steps at the force at which she hurled herself at him. He laughed as she squeezed him tightly.

"I'm so glad you're back and we didn't have to kill you!" she said tactfully. Squall patted her head.

"I'm sure you are. Selphie, could you let me breath now?" he asked dryly. Selphie stepped back with a grin, and surprised him by wiping away a tear. Squall's expression softened.

"Selph?" he asked gently. Her bottom lip trembled. He smiled at her. "Oh, Selphie," he murmured as she burst into tears. He put his arms round his friend, holding her as she cried against his chest. After a moment she pulled away, and smiled weakly at him.

"I'm sorry, I'm being stupid," she said, wiping her eyes. Squall smiled at her, and she swallowed hard.

"I was so worried," she said, and turned back to Irvine and Zell. They were both looking at her sympathetically. Selphie felt really awkward. Rinoa stepped up to her.

"Selph, I know how you feel. You held it in all this time..." she said with a smile. Selphie grinned.

"Well, I had to take care of these two, didn't I?!" she said, gesturing towards Zell and Irvine. The two guys looked a little indignant, but neither protested, because they knew Selphie really was the boss around there, when Squall wasn't around. She had proved that on the mission to the missile base. Squall sighed.

"What are we going to do about her?" he asked, looking over to the Sorceress. Fujin took a deep breath.

"I think I can help." she said quietly. Everyone listened to her. She looked a little nervous.

"The doctor who implanted the Crystal Ashen is still alive. Oriscala made me put him a cell, and he is guarded by those dwarves." she said. Squall nodded.

"We must get him. He might be the only one who knows how to get Quistis back." he said gravely. Everyone agreed. Seifer stepped forward.

"Squall, with your permission I would like to lead the team to recover the doctor. I think you and Rinoa should stay here, in case she wakes up. Anyway, both of you need a break," he added in a lower voice. Squall looked at Seifer hard, his piercing blue eyes trying to figure out what was going on in his old enemy's mind. Seifer met his gaze with his own dark blue eyes. Finally Squall relented.

"Okay. Take Selphie, Fujin and Irvine with you." he said with a sigh.

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Tired, and aching, Xu and Celesa managed to get back to the main hall. It was full of the wounded SeeD's and the medical students darting around them. Dr Kadowaki was over seeing the whole thing. Xu walked up to her quickly. Dr Kadowaki looked flustered.

"Xu! How's it going out there?" she asked, bending over a moaning student. Xu tried not to look at the gaping wound on the SeeD's stomach. Celesa on the contrary, was staring at it in fascination. Xu cleared her throat.

"It's over. We won." she said with barely suppressed delight. Dr Kadowaki smiled.

"Wonderful!" she said. Xu sighed.

"But there are many wounded. And some Esthar soldiers with injuries which aren't fatal," she said. Dr Kadowaki glanced up from her work.

"What are you suggesting, Xu? That we treat them?" she asked. Xu shook her head.

"No. If they were Esthar Garden students then yes. But these are grown men." she said. Dr Kadowaki nodded.

"Take them outside the Garden. Leave them in the plains." Dr Kadowaki said with a trace of bitterness. Xu agreed. She turned to Celesa, who was just using an elixir on her wound. It healed as Xu watched.

"Come on. We have work to do." she said.  
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It took almost five hours to get to Esthar. All of them slept on the way, Selphie in Irvine's arms. Seifer watched the couple almost jealously. There was an unspoken love between the two, which was obvious to anyone who saw them. They had grown up together, and although separated between the ages of five and seventeen, they still retained the strong bond they had when they were children. Seifer wondered why Edea and Cid had seen it fit to send them all to different Gardens (with the exception of Quistis and Zell, they had been adopted and joined Garden on their own decision) It was something which had troubled Seifer for a while.

Eventually, they reached Esthar, at about mid morning. They didn't stop to eat, but headed straight to the cave laboratory, where Fujin knew Dr Mitchell was being held. When they got there, the caves seemed empty. It was slightly disturbing, as they knew the hideous little dwarf people had to be somewhere, and Seifer and Fujin knew all too well how good they were at hiding and ambushing unsuspecting people. But Seifer had a plan. Stepping into the cave he yelled.

"Hari! Lika! Get out here!" he roared, his voice echoing round the labyrinth of caves. Selphie glanced around, trying to see through the darkness. Her sea-green eyes eventually detected a small movement ahead. Lika came scuttling into view. Seifer gave the small thing a look of contempt.

"Show us to Dr Mitchell's cell." he ordered imperially. Lika murmured something, and bowed several times. The effect was comical, but no-one felt like laughing. The caves were dark, and full of odd noises which were at the least disturbing. And as Seifer and Fujin knew, they were treading dangerous ground. If Lika had any idea they were now against the Sorceress, then they were done for. Luckily, she seemed to perceive the two SeeD's as prisoners, and paid no heed to them. Seifer and Fujin silently followed Lika through the labyrinth, grateful for the guidance, as they could never quite tell the direction in these dark caves.

They reached the white, well lit lab after a few minutes. Lika glanced at Selphie and Irvine, and Seifer felt obliged to explain.

"New test subjects. The Sorceress' orders," he added. Selphie and Irvine got the hint, and began to do their best to look dejected and betrayed. Lika said nothing, but pushed open the door. Eventually, after walking down many identical corridors of pure white, they reached what was obviously a prison. A thin, gaunt looking man was behind the bars. A look of hatred came over him as he saw Lika.

"You little bitch! Let me out of here, you freak! I'll kill you!" he threatened. Seifer groaned inwardly. It seemed Dr Mitchell wasn't all that far from insanity. Although who in their right mind would resurrect an evil Sorceress, he didn't know. Seifer stepped in front of Lika, who was eyeing the trapped doctor with glee.

"I am Seifer Almasy," Seifer said. The doctor glanced at him.

"I know. I recognize you, I'm not stupid!" he said angrily. Seifer nodded. He turned to Lika.

"Leave us." he ordered. Lika turned and left obediently. Seifer turned back to the doctor.

"You are to come with us." he said, and began to enter a code on the digital lock which secured the bars. The doctor watched in amazement as Seifer opened the door, and he was free. He took a step forward, but Seifer and Fujin blocked his way.

"Not so fast. We are taking you to Oriscala." Seifer said. The doctor looked at them in terror.

"No! No...leave me here...I don't want to see her!" he cried. Seifer and Fujin grabbed his arms simultaneously. Fujin hissed angrily at him.

"Do not struggle! Otherwise we will be forced to knock you unconscious and take you to her. Your choice," she whispered menacingly. He stopped trying to free himself and Fujin relaxed her vice like grip.

"Let's go," said Seifer. The doctor reluctantly allowed himself to be led back out of the caves.

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Caraway felt strangely uncomfortable in the presence of his daughter and her boyfriend. Squall and Rinoa were talking quietly, and he didn't want to interrupt, but at the same time had so many questions he wanted to ask both of them. Eventually, Rinoa looked up at him, and smiled nervously. He smiled back at her warmly.

"Are you feeling better now?" he asked her. She nodded.

"Yes. I feel great," she said with a shy glance at Squall. Caraway cleared his throat as Squall stood to face him.

"I owe you an apology, I'm sorry for what I said back there" he said sincerely, holding out his hand. Squall shook it, looking the older man in the eye.

"It's no big deal. I wasn't thinking straight back then." he said quietly. Caraway nodded.

"I can see you really care about Rinoa. And I know she loves you," he said, feeling a flush creep over him. Squall seemed uncomfortable.

"Um, yeah," he replied, glancing at Rinoa, who was grinning at the pair of them. Caraway sighed.

"Thankyou for taking care of her," he said, and turning, walked out

of the room. Rinoa began to giggle. Squall sat back down on the sofa next to her and sighed in relief.

"That was awkward," he said with a small smile. Rinoa giggled and put her hand on his arm.

"Yeah, he didn't know what to say to you!" she said. Squall smiled at her. Rinoa leant back, resting her head on his shoulder.

"I wish we could go back to Garden," she murmured. Squall sighed.

"I know. But there is so much left to do," he whispered. Rinoa nodded, and put her hand on his.

"But we did it Squall. We managed to use Oriscala's weapon against her." she said seriously. Squall nodded with a hint of a smile. He too remembered Oriscala's talks on 'love being a weapon as strong as hate'. No-one realized at the time, but she was being more accurate than they had thought. Love was a weapon, for Sorceress'.

She had wanted to use that weapon against Rinoa, thinking that in her despair over losing the only person she truly loved she would collapse. But Rinoa was able to use that weapon to her advantage. Only she and Squall knew, but the blue sphere she had created, was not solely her powers alone. It was something Edea had only taught her how to do in theory, the mythical physical manifestation of the love between a Sorceress and her Knight. Only a handful of mortals had ever seen the phenomena, as it was a very rare thing for a Sorceress ever to use this power, or to want to show it. It was a private, intimate expression of their love, and was very rarely used as a weapon.

Rinoa smiled at the thought. What a glorious moment that had been, her crafting the electric blue sphere, drawing on Squall's emotions and thoughts, pouring her very soul into the magic. The feeling, of their spirits actually uniting, had been a thousand times better than any physical pleasure. But it had been necessary to knock out the Sorceress, and Rinoa was glad the spell was as effective as Edea had promised it would be.

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Calmly, Seifer entered the mansion again. By the time they got back to Deling City, it was late evening. They had been forced to stop in Esthar to eat something, because the doctor hadn't been fed for days, and the SeeD's themselves were on the brink of fainting from hunger. When they finally got back to the mansion, Selphie was longing to sit down and rest her aching feet and legs. Irvine, smirking had offered to carry her, but she refused his offer. But after walking miles to the mansion (the buses were out) she was beginning to seriously consider his offer.

The door was opened by the same young female servant whom Rinoa had been so rude to before. Without a word she ushered them inside, and showed them to the parlour where the Sorceress lay. The room was

empty save for Zell, who was guarding her in case she woke up. But, like some kind of Sleeping Beauty, the Sorceress remained in a serene state of slumber. Seifer watched as Zell rose silently. He rightly guessed it was a bit unnerving to sit in silence with only a sleeping Sorceress for company.

"She hasn't moved." said Zell, looking at the doctor. The doctor was gazing at Oriscala with something akin to terror on his face.

"She...when did this happen?" he asked tentatively. Seifer shrugged.

"About sixteen hours ago. Our Sorceress defeated her. Sorceress Rinoa." he said with a glint in his eyes. The doctor looked even more scared.

"There's another Sorceress?! One more powerful than Oriscala?" he asked, his eyes darting around the room as if some evil witch was going to leap out of the shadows at him. Seifer suppressed a wicked laugh.

"Yes. Sorceress Rinoa is far more powerful. But for now, you are safe. We want you to reverse the possession." he said. Dr Mitchell gasped.

"But that...do you realize the consequences?" he asked. Seifer looked bored.

"What?" he asked, glancing at Oriscala.

"If the Crystal Ashen is removed, then the Sorceress will die," he said. Seifer laughed bitterly.

"What a shame. Just do it." he said in a bored voice. Dr Mitchell laughed nervously.

"So will the girl Oriscala was possessing." he said in a tremulous voice. Seifer's eyes opened wide.

"What? Quistis will...die?" he asked incredulously. The doctor nodded.

"Yes. Her body wont be able to survive without the Sorceress. The power in the crystal sustains the girl, keeping her alive while Oriscala is using her body. Because in order to work, the Crystal needs such a large amount of energy, it took almost all Quistis had even before Oriscala possessed her. If the Crystal is removed, then so is Quistis' energy." he explained. Seifer turned to Zell.

"Go get Squall. Tell him what we've just heard," he said grimly.

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Squall and Rinoa stared at the Sorceress as Dr Mitchell explained

again what would happen if the Sorceress was to die. Rinoa shook her head.

"There must be some way," she said, concern etched on her features. She had changed out of her Sorceress clothes into a short blue cotton dress and a white linen shirt which hung open. Dr Mitchell obviously didn't now she was the Sorceress he was so terrified of. Squall pushed back the strands of hair which fell over his eyes.

"There has to be another way," he said grimly. Mitchell looked anxious.

"I...I really don't know. I could attempt to remove the crystal...but she would surely die," he said. Squall gestured angrily.

"No! We're not going to lose Quistis...not after all this," he said. Everyone was really depressed. There seemed no way out of this. Rinoa stood up.

"I'm going to try and contact her." she said determinedly. Squall frowned.

"What?" he asked softly. Rinoa gulped.

"Let me speak to Quistis. Maybe she know a way..." she said, her voice faltering. She hadn't dreamt of Quistis for days. But she was fairly confident she could do it now, because she was now far more powerful than before. Squall nodded, and she smiled tightly at him, before leaving the room. Dr Mitchell looked confused.

"What did she mean, 'contact'?" he asked nervously. Seifer smirked. Squall looked up, and realized from what Zell had said that the doctor was terrified of Sorceress.

"She is Sorceress Rinoa." Squall said, a trace of a smile on his lips. The doctor's eyes went wide in shock.

"Really?! She is?! She doesn't look like a Sorceress....but she was able to fight Oriscala, and win? Amazing..I must study her. Er, she's not dangerous, is she?" he asked Squall. Squall bit his lip.

"Well, if she gets into one of her moods..." he began with a smirk. The doctor looked like he was going to wet himself.

"Maybe I'll just stay out of her way then..." he said, glancing nervously at the door Rinoa had gone out of. Selphie felt mischievous.

"This is her house, you know...she defeated the former occupant, a General of the Galbadian Army. And she didn't even use magic," Selphie said, her green eyes wide. The doctor looked even more scared.

"What...what did she do to him?" he asked. Selphie shook her head.

"Some say he's still here...still wanders the corridors of this house..." she said convincingly. The doctor gulped. Squall laughed.

"She's only joking. The General is Rinoa's father. Rinoa isn't a bad Sorceress." he said. The doctor didn't look convinced.

"How do you know?" he asked, in a voice just above a whisper. Squall raised an eyebrow.

"Because she's my girlfriend." he replied.  
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Rinoa drew the curtains to her bedroom. The room was light and airy, and when she had arrived, she was surprised to see it exactly the way she had left it four years ago. It was sad in a way, to think that her father hadn't been able to change anything. Maybe he hoped she would come back one day. Rinoa didn't know, but for now she was glad of a space to herself. Caraway had let Squall sleep in the bedroom next to Rinoa's, not as large or luxurious, but still nicer than his room at Balamb.

Sitting on the lemon-coloured bed, Rinoa shut her eyes, focusing on Quistis. Eventually, she felt lightheaded, and realized she was nearly there. Then an image slowly melted into her mind. A field of flowers.

"Quistis." she called in her mind. She couldn't see her anywhere. Then she heard a voice.

"Rinoa!" she cried. Rinoa spun around to see two women. Quistis, and Oriscala. Rinoa swallowed hard.

"Quistis, I need to talk to you," she said. Both women looked at her. Oriscala looked strangely calm.

"Rinoa...I know what's happened." Quistis said. Rinoa nodded.

"Do you know what we can do to save you?" she asked. Quistis smiled.

"You can't." she said in a bittersweet tone. Rinoa frowned.

"There must be a way..." Rinoa said, feeling a lump in her throat. Quistis smiled. Oriscala remained silent. Rinoa ignored the other Sorceress.

"Please, Quistis, don't give up..." she said, feeling a horrible sinking feeling of despair. Quistis waled up to Rinoa until she was only a foot away from her.

"Rinoa..I used to be jealous of you. Because you captured Squall's heart, and you made him what he is today. I envied your spirit." she said. Rinoa felt tears force themselves into her eyes.

"Don't say this Quistis," she murmured. Quistis sighed.

"I do wish...that I had the chance to say goodbye to everyone. Especially Squall." she said sadly. Rinoa reached out to Quistis, but

the other girl moved away.

"Say goodbye to them for me," Quistis said softly. Rinoa wiped away her tears angrily.

"No! Quistis, we'll save you, there must be a way..." she said desperately. Quistis smiled lovingly at her.

"Rinoa, I know you've done your best, but this is real life. Not everything works out like a fairytale. You have no real choice. Either you revive the Sorceress, and you can have both of us, but her more than often, or you remove the Crystal, and we both die. You know in your heart that there is no real choice. It..it is better that I die than Oriscala reigns again." she said softly. Rinoa hugged her middle, choking back a sob.

"You..you're just going to leave us? Without even trying?" she asked Quistis. Quistis shook her head.

"I'm not trying to be a martyr, Rinoa. But I've had a lot of time to think about this. This is the only option left to us!" she said, looking troubled. Rinoa nodded.

"I understand." she said, her bottom lip trembling. Quistis smiled at her.

"Take care of Squall for me," she said quietly, with a smile. Rinoa nodded, wiping her eyes.

"I will," she promised. Quistis smiled, and turned back to where Oriscala was silently watching. Rinoa glanced at the other Sorceress.

"I'm going now." she said clearly. Quistis smiled at her.

"Goodbye," she whispered. Rinoa smiled at her weakly, and before she could say anything else, the connection was broken, and she found herself lying on her bed.

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Dr Mitchell almost jumped out of his skin when Rinoa entered the room again. Squall glanced up as he heard the door open, and was concerned to see her pale, tear-streaked face. She crossed the room to him, and sat down on the sofa next to him.

"Did you speak to Quistis?" he asked her. Rinoa nodded, but didn't say anything. There was a painful silence in the room. Dr Mitchell stood behind the sofa, next to Fujin and Seifer. Zell, Selphie and Irvine were sitting on the other sofa in the room, watching Rinoa anxiously. She looked terrible.

"I spoke to her." she said softly. Squall looked worried.

"Does she know a way to end all this?" he asked her. Rinoa laughed

hollowly.

"Oh yes. The problem is, this isn't a children's story, or a game." she said bitterly. Squall frowned.

"What do you mean? Is there no hope?" he asked. He didn't know it, but he was echoing Quistis' words, spoken to him while he was enchanted. Rinoa shook her head.

"Of course there is. She's given us hope. The only way we can be free of Oriscala is if Quistis dies." she said quietly. Squall shook his head.

"No...there must be another way," he said, refusing to accept it. Rinoa covered her eyes with both hands, resting her elbows on her knees.

"There isn't. She said to me, 'this is real life.' I understand now. Not everything turns out the way it should. Not everything is fair." she said. Her friends were all looking at her in disbelief.

Squall stood up, his eyes downcast.

"Then we have to do what she wants." he said, despair in his voice. Selphie moved to object, but Irvine forced her to remain seated. She closed her mouth, unable to look at Squall or Rinoa. Dr Mitchell stepped up to Squall.

"Do you want me to perform the operation now?" he asked him. Squall glanced at Rinoa, and then at all his friends. They were all staring at him, all their eyes held the same glistening hope, longing for him to say no, that they would find another way. Those hopes went unanswered.

"Yes," Squall said, utterly defeated.  
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They sat in silence in the other room, while Dr Mitchell performed the operation. Squall and Rinoa both felt incredible guilty, even though they really had no choice. Selphie, Zell and Irvine were all in a state of depression, Selphie particularly seemed to be feeling pain. Fujin and Seifer felt hollow. They both knew, if they hadn't played their part in all this Quistis would not be dying. There was such stillness in the room, the only sound the clock ticking, that already it felt like a morgue.

Eventually, the door opened, and one of the servants walked into the room. She murmured that Dr Mitchell had finished, and he was asking for Squall. Glancing at Rinoa, Squall stood and followed the servant. He entered the room where Oriscala/Quistis lay. He was surprised to see Dr Mitchell standing by her, looking down into her face. He glanced up as Squall entered the room.

"She's awake," he said cryptically, and left the room. Squall frowned. What could he mean? The Sorceress...had he tricked them into

letting him revive her? Squall rushed to the woman's side. Looking down, he gasped to see Quistis open her eyes. He dropped to his knees, staring into her face.

"Squall..." she whispered. He grabbed her hand, feeling a lump rise to his throat. Quistis gasped, and coughed. Squall stared into her eyes as a tear rolled down her cheeks.

"I wanted to say goodbye..." she whispered. Squall swallowed hard, unable to speak. Quistis smiled.

"But I guess I don't have to anymore," she said in a slightly stronger voice. Squall's mouth dropped open as Quistis laughed hoarsely. He gasped.

"Do you mean..." She nodded.

"I'm not going to die," she whispered joyously.

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## Epilogue

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The winds rolled over the Winhill Bluffs, battering the long grass down as the eight SeeD's walked over it. Squall and Rinoa headed the procession. As they neared Raine's grave, the wind died down, and became only a fresh breeze. Gazing at the grave for a moment, Squall turned back to his friends. Behind them, he could see Ellone, and several other people from Esthar. Squall and the others stepped aside to let the coffin pass. Ellone looked pale, but she smiled weakly at Squall as she passed him. Squall shut his eyes, trying to block out the overwhelming guilt he felt over Laguna's death.

The funeral procession gathered around Raine Loire's grave. Next to it, a freshly dug grave, which they slowly began to lower Laguna's body into. Ellone watched sadly, as she finally released the only father she had ever known. For Squall, this was also true, except Laguna was his real father, even though Ellone had known him better. He watched as the oaken casket disappeared forever into the earth, and the people gathered round stepped up to pay their respects. Kiros and Ward were among them, and they glanced awkwardly at Squall as they bid goodbye to Laguna. Rinoa squeezed his hand reassuringly, she knew what pain he was in.

Finally, only the SeeD's and Ellone were left at the grave. Rinoa released Squall's hand, and as he watched her, she and the others turned and slowly began to walk back towards the village, leaving him and Ellone together. Ellone stepped up close to Squall, he opened his mouth to say something, but the words caught in his throat. It was all he could manage to hoarsely whisper "I'm sorry,". Ellone smiled gently at him.

"It's ok. It wasn't your fault. Squall shut his eyes in pain. Ellone sighed. "Really, Squall, you couldn't help it. Forgive yourself. I

have," she added in a whisper. Squall opened his eyes, the wind blowing his hair across his face. Ellone smiled at him.

"Squall, he wanted to tell you..."

"Please, Ellone, don't," he said hoarsely, the lump in his throat making talk painful. She ignored him.

"He was proud of you. He was sorry..so sorry he didn't find you before. He didn't want to mess up your life by suddenly introducing himself as your father." she said in a whisper. Squall shut his eyes, listening to every word, and feeling his heart ache.

"I never listened to him, when he tried to tell me," he said painfully. Ellone cut him off.

"He understood. Laguna wasn't as dumb as he sometimes acted." she said with a wry smile. Squall attempted to smile, but failed miserably. Ellone hugged him gently.

"Squall...promise me you wont forget him. Or Raine," she whispered in his ear. Squall shook his head.

"How could I?" he whispered back. Ellone felt tears in her eyes.

"Both of them...really loved you," she said, her voice trembling with sadness. Squall held her tighter. "They..they were your parents. And in a way, mine. I know you grew up an orphan, so did I, but you always had Raine and Laguna. Even though both of us truly are orphans now, they are still with us," she whispered. Squall nodded, not saying anything.

The two stood in the field, the winds caressing the two as they stood at their parents grave. Rinoa watched from the village, where to her the pair looked tiny. She turned, and went back to the others.

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Selphie moaned in pleasure as she threw herself back on her hard, standard issue SeeD bed. It was wonderful to be back in her own room again, having all her friends back again. She was even grateful to have back her hard, uncomfortable bed. Smiling, she lay back, her eyes shut, and sighed in contentment. Unfortunately, she didn't have peace for long. Irvine was at the door.

"What?" she asked, without opening her eyes. Even though he hadn't said anything, she could sense his presence. He walked into the room. Selphie sat up, pulling her skirt down.

"What?" she asked again. He smiled at her, removing his hat and dusting it off.

"D'ya want to go get something to eat?" he asked her casually. Selphie shook her head.

"No. Leave me alone." she said wearily. Irvine sighed.

"Selphie, you've been in here for two hours. Even Squall and Rinoa have come out of their room." he said Selphie's eyes shot open.

"Room?" she asked. Irvine laughed.

"I meant rooms. God, you have a dirty mind," he teased her. Selphie blushed. Reluctantly, she swung her legs off the bed and put her boots on.

"Fine. I'll go with you." she said. Irvine grinned.

"Great. I'm starving." he said. Selphie stood up. Even in two inch heels she was way shorter than him. The two walked out of the room. Passing the library, Irvine paused.

"Shall we go check on Zell?" he asked innocently. Selphie grinned.

"Yeah...I'm sure him and Celesa are making up for lost time!" she said with a smile. Walking into the library, they were surprised to see Zell and Celesa engaged in what appeared to be a serious conversation. Celesa smiled at the two SeeD's over Zell's shoulder. He turned round to see them.

"Hi! What's up?" he asked them. They had only been back at Garden a few days. Selphie shrugged.

"Nothing. We were going to the canteen. Wanna come?" she asked him. Zell glanced at Celesa.

"No, it's ok. I'll stay here." he said. Selphie laughed and turned away.

"How did I know you'd say that!" she laughed. Irvine followed her out of the library.

"Poor sucker, he's got it baaad." said Irvine, shaking his head in mock sadness. Selphie laughed.

"Yes, isn't it terrible when guy's show how they really feel." she said pointedly. He didn't rise to the bait, but she could practically hear him grasping for a rejoinder. Smiling to herself, she continued walking down the marble corridor. It was so good to be back in their beautiful Garden. The streams and fountains scattered around made it such a peaceful place, no-one would guess it was a military academy.

In the canteen, they were surprised to see the usual queue for hotdogs was missing. Irvine and Selphie were able to get the legendary snack straight away. Sitting at an empty table, they ignored the whispers and nudges from admiring students and began to eat their meal. They were interrupted by a female cadet.

"Excuse me..you're Irvine and Selphie, right?" she asked. Selphie sighed, but Irvine switched into flirt mode straight away.

"Yes, we are, What can I do for you?" he said with a charming smile. Selphie fought the urge to kick him and smiled sweetly at the younger girl.

"I was wondering...is the Commander dating anyone? I think he's really cute!" she said dreamily. The smile left Irvine's face and Selphie burst out laughing.

"The Commander! Ha! And you thought she was going to ask you out!" she shrieked with laughter, holding her sides. She was also relieved. Irvine gave her a dirty look. He didn't answer the student. Selphie turned to her.

"Yes, Squall is dating someone," she replied, trying to keep a straight face. The girl shrugged and walked away. Selphie began to giggle again at Irvine's embarrassment.

"Oh, shut up," he said to her, pretending to be angry at her. She only laughed harder. Irvine scowled at her, then it occurred to him.

Selphie's laughter turned into a cry of surprise as Irvine leaned over the small table and kissed her passionately. Pulling away, he sat back down and looked at her shocked expression with a smile of satisfaction, his own heart thudding. She looked at him, her earnest face full of questioning. He smiled at her, and she looked delighted.

Finally, he realized what Selphie really wanted.

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Quistis sat in the empty classroom. She wasn't alone, Fujin was with her. Quistis shuddered as she remembered the events leading up to her possession. Fujin felt guilty, but didn't know what to say.

"Quistis..I..." she murmured. Quistis smiled at her.

"Fujin, it's over. You don't need to say anything." she said. Fujin smiled tentatively. The girl had a hard time being liked, and it was unusual for her to actually have female friends. She didn't want to lose them.

"Thankyou Quistis. You have no idea what it means to me, to be forgiven like this," she said sincerely. Quistis smiled to herself.

"Yes, I do. I realized a lot of things while I was possessed. And, I realize everyone has a motive. No-one does anything for no reason. Your reason was your love of...Seifer." she said, her voice faltering towards the end of her sentence. Fujin shut her eye briefly. She knew Quistis still had a hard time dealing with \*that\* aspect of forgiveness. Fujin placed a hand on Quistis' shoulder.

"You don't have to forgive everyone," she said softly. Quistis didn't

react. Fujin sat beside her at the desk. "What he did to you...it would have destroyed a lesser person. I know you don't want to hear this, but he has changed." Quistis sighed.

"That's what makes it so hard. I am fully aware that he's changed, but however much I want to, I can't forgive him," she said, her voice painful. Fujin nodded. Quistis continued.

"I really want us all to be friends, especially after all that has happened, but I can't bear to see him," she said, her voice cracking. Fujin rubbed her back as Quistis began to cry, remembering. Fujin felt so sorry for her.

"I just...it was so horrible," Quistis sobbed. Fujin bit her lip, and didn't say anything. She knew, she had been outside the room while Seifer had committed his sin. Fujin had condoned it, and knew she herself was partly to blame.

"I wake up in the middle of the night...reliving it..feeling as if it was actually happening....terrified that it might happen again," she whispered through her sobs. Fujin passed her a tissue from the box on the desk. Quistis shuddered, her body racked with sobs.

"I don't understand why he did it..." she gasped. Fujin sighed.

"I don't know either. I'm not sure if he knows," she said gently. Quistis looked up at her.

"Have you spoken to him about it?" she asked Fujin, her blue eyes misted with tears. Fujin shook her head.

"Not really. I think...he's very, very guilty about it. I can tell." she said softly. Quistis sighed, pulling herself together.

"I know he is. That's what makes it so difficult. Edea...she told me he cried about it when he confessed to her what he had done. I know in my heart he truly regrets it, I know he has changed, but I can't handle this right now. It's still too painful. Not all scars heal with time." she added in a low voice. Fujin nodded.

"I don't blame you." she said huskily. Quistis stood up, throwing her sodden tissue in the waste paper basket. Fujin watched her as she crossed to the door.

"Quistis, one day you'll be able to live with this." she reassured her. Quistis gazed into Fujin's colourless, but compassionate eye. Quistis smiled weakly.

"I hope so," she murmured.  
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"Xu, tell my secretary I'm taking her to dinner tonight," Squall said as Xu toyed with the flowers Rinoa had put in Squall's office. The older woman smiled, and glanced over to Rinoa as she crossed the room to his desk.

"Why don't you tell her yourself?" Rinoa said with a smile, placing a stack of papers on his desk. Squall smiled at her.

"I thought you were busy. Have you really finished all that already?" he asked, surprised to see all the work she had done in only an hour. Rinoa smiled.

"I'm going to the training centre. Unless you need me for anything else?" she asked. Squall shook his head. Rinoa was really serious about becoming a SeeD. He smiled as she left the room. Xu smirked as she saw the expression on Squall's face.

"You are so smitten!" she said with a little laugh. Squall blushed.

"Hey, I worked hard to get that Sorceress." he said with a smile. Xu nodded.

"And we are all very grateful." she said seriously. Squall flicked through the papers Rinoa had put on his desk. Every single one was perfect. He smiled to himself.

"Xu, I'm going out for a while," he said. Xu grinned.

"Go get her," she said softly. Squall smiled at her, shrugging on his leather coat. Xu laughed as he rushed out of the office, grabbing his gunblade on the way.

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Rinoa managed to fight her way to the secret area. Slightly out of breath, she leaned on the crumbling stone wall, looking out to the awesome sight of the well-lit Garden in the early evening. The place looked so beautiful, and she was completely alone. She place only came alive after curfew, when the older SeeD's went there to talk, among other things.

Rinoa leant on the wall, the breeze blowing her raven black hair away from her shoulders. She shut her eyes, thankful she was still able to come here, and that all her friends were still in the Garden with her.

"Do you mind company?" Squall asked her. She spun around, slightly startled. She smiled as she saw him.

"I don't mind," she said softly. Squall dug the point of his gunblade into the ground, leaning on it.

"What were you thinking about?" he asked her. She shrugged, and turned back to the view.

"Everything," she murmured. He walked up close to her. She shut her eyes, enjoying the breeze.

"Why happened to the Crystal?" she asked him softly. Squall sighed.

"It's gone. Don't worry about it." he said. Rinoa opened her eyes, and looked hard at him.

"But I do. It contains Oriscala. If someone was to..."

"Rinoa, I put it in a safe place." he said gently. She nodded, trusting him.

"Okay." she murmured, looking out to the Garden. Squall followed her gaze. He too felt proud, and relieved, to look out at the Garden. He knew about the battle which had taken place, and he all the more glad that his Seed's were able to combat an enemy as strong as the Estharian Army.

"Squall..." she murmured. He smiled at her.

"Don't worry." he whispered. She smiled back at him, leaning her head against his shoulder as they looked at their home. Squall wrapped his arms around her from behind, hugging her stomach. She rubbed his arms, smiling as she leant against his shoulder, tucking her head in against his neck. Rinoa sighed happily.

Finally, she hoped they would have peace.  
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Ellone knelt beside Laguna and Raine's grave, smiling to herself as she polished the inscription. Now, under Raine's name, there was that of her husband. Laguna and Raine Loire.

Ellone prayed that they were finally together again. Kneeling in the long grass, the wind ruffling her short brown hair, the President of Esthar wondered what was in the box Squall had thrown into his fathers grave, asking Laguna to keep it safe. She knew it was important.

Standing up, Ellone blew a kiss to her adopted parents, and turned back to the helicopter waiting to take her back to her palace. She hoped her little brother was alright now, and hoped he had peace. Stepping into the chopper, she glanced back at the grave as it took off, heading back to Esthar.  
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Raine and Laguna watched their daughter leave. Raine had an arm around Laguna's waist, and rested her hand against his shoulder.

"She's so good," Raine whispered. Laguna smiled proudly.

"Yes, she is. She's going to be a good president. I feel sorry for anyone who opposes her," he said with a smile. Raine hugged him tighter.

"As long as she and Squall are happy." she whispered. Laguna looked

into her face. She was gazing after the retreating chopper, as if she could still see Ellone. He knew she wished she could be with her children, wished she could be more than a shadow of a memory for them. Laguna took Raine's hands, and she smiled at him, her eyes glistening damply with tears.

"Come on. Let them get on with their lives. We've got a whole new one ahead of us," he reminded her with a smile. They turned, and slowly faded away.

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The End

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Whoo hoo! Finally finished! What did you think? This is by far the longest fanfic I have ever written! And I loved (almost) every second of it. I hope I handled the whole rape thing sensitively...and that I didn't offend too many of you. I don't think it would have been realistic for Quistis to have forgiven Seifer at the end...after all, what he did to her was monstrous. But hey, I'm talking about reality in a fanfic about Sorceress' and magic...

I have a question...do y'all want a sequel to this? I have a fiendish little idea....it involves a triple wedding (only joking)

Thankyou to Demiath, without your input this would have been a \*very\* short fic indeed! I really needed the encouragement you gave me, and I am very grateful.

Please send all comments to Selphie\_Leonhart@day-dream.co.uk

I love feedback!

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The sequel to The Commander is called Forsaken. You will find it on my website. In this new story, Squall and the others are back in Balamb Garden, a few weeks after the events in The Commander. Slowly, they begin to come to terms with what happened there, and settle down. Not all of them are comfortable with the new alliance between Squall, Seifer and Fujin, not least of all Quistis. A strange sickness begins to creep over the SeeDs, and once they find out it is a deadly illness with no cure, it is a race against time to discover what exactly happened in their past to cause this disease. Shocking revelations and new bonds are formed in Forsaken. Find it here:

<http://www.RinoaLeonhartFF8.homestead.com>

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